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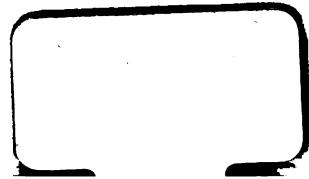
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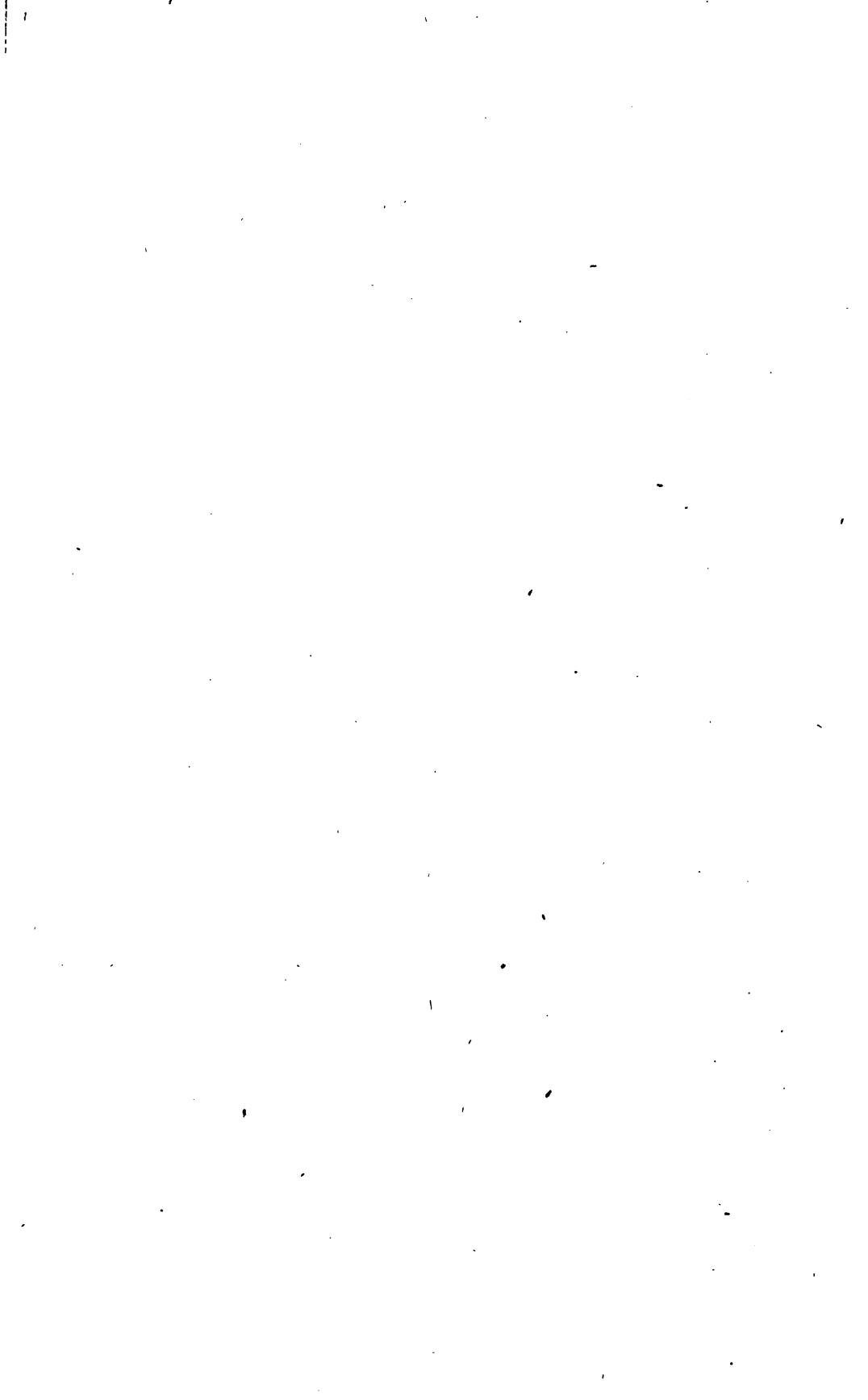


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A TANGLED SKEIN.

CHAPTER I.

COMING HOME.

A BLAZING sunset in the Indian ocean, — out of sight of land, — and a great steamship throbbing her resolute way in solitary grandeur through the glittering waves that creamed and darkened in her wake! I think I can picture the scene in my own mind, but I had rather not try to describe it; for I was born within the sound of Bow bells, have never been to India, and consequently never came back from thence. I have to deal with very stern realities affecting persons, most of whom I can lay my hands upon at a few hours' notice, and associate them with scenes familiar to me from my youth, — all but this. I should not like to run the risk of marring what I *know*, by attempting to detail what I have only heard of. I have read, — (who has not?) — much print about the Overland Route. Shall I take down from their shelves half a dozen of the books in which it is described, hash up for you as many odds and ends of scenes and sketches therein contained, and serve up the dish in a sauce of my own composition? Will it possess the genuine Indian flavor? I am afraid not. It would taste of the pot; and I should be sure to put in some ingredient which, without being pleasing to the palate of the uninitiated, would expose my poor *rechauffé* in its true character. No! I will, if you please, describe that which I have seen, — and that only.

The vessel in question was the Peninsular and Oriental steamship *Ganges*, Captain Stevenson, bound to Suez. She had on board many sufferers by the Indian mutiny, and amongst them Captain Stephen Frankland, of the Bengal Light Cavalry. You will be good enough to picture for yourselves the good ship which is bearing him, the persons of his fellow-

voyagers (other than those to whom you will be introduced), and the appearances of the sunset which he is watching on the evening of the 8th of July, 1858, when first he is presented to your notice.

Brave, honest, Stephen Frankland! If there ever was a man who deserved to have a smooth and pleasant pilgrimage through life, it was he; but Fate, — chance, a combination of untoward circumstances, call it what you please, — took up the thread of his life and tangled it, as we shall see, into a dark web, in which all hope and happiness seemed at one time to be lost. It is his story that I am about to tell, therefore let me photograph him at once, as it were, on the title-page of my book.

He is incapable of resisting the indignity; for he has been to death's door with jungle fever combined with sunstroke, and is still very, very weak, — so weak that it has taken him half an hour to totter from his cabin to the spot where he now reclines, wrapped in his regimental cloak, and gazing over the darkening sea westward, far westward! towards the home he has not seen for years, — that he may never see again!

Did he stand upright, he would measure at least five feet eleven, and his wasted limbs, that are now extended in such lamentable helplessness upon the deck, were, a few weeks ago, full of grace and strength. He has fought under Havelock, — he has marched with Chamberlayne, — he has borne the whole brunt of the mutiny. He is one of that scant band of heroes who kept the tiger at bay, — hurling him back, in spite of all his frantic bounds, till England arose in her might and strangled the bloody brute in his lair! He has won the Victoria Cross, and by and by, when the armies are amalgamated, will be made a brevet-major, if he has a friend at the Horse Guards to remind the authorities of his services. Oh, his country is proud

of him,— and very grateful too, of course! Though, being a country of a naturally phlegmatic temperament, she does not give way to her feelings very warmly.

The young soldier's face is very grave, and his fine brown eyes, which are unnaturally bright just now, have rather a hard expression. His brow is calm and massive, but his mouth, though almost overshadowed by his tawny moustache, gives a look to the lower part of his face which is quite at variance with the sternness of its upper features. Wait until he smiles, and the stern look will melt away, and one of almost womanly softness take its place. To a fresh acquaintance, Stephen Frankland's manner is not pleasant: he is cold and haughty, especially with men. No one values the good-will of companions and comrades more than he does; and I think that his reserve springs more from shyness than from pride, or any other feeling. He values friendship so highly, that he cannot bear the idea of forcing himself on that of any one, and will not lightly admit any one to his own. But if he be slow in making friends, he is slower still in losing them; and many a raw cornet, who has complained loudly after the manner of the tribe, "that Frankland was so confoundedly bumptious," has been checked by the best men in the regiment, and told to wait till he knew him better before he repeated such an opinion. It is a great pity that people will go about masquerading in manners which do not belong to them; but my hero is a mortal man, and subject to all the diseases, mental and bodily, that flesh is heir to. So he will be introduced to you to-morrow. Bow stiffly, say half a dozen chilly common-places; and if you go away disgusted with his reserve and seek his society no more,—if you are a good sort of fellow, and worth cultivating,—he will take to heart your not liking him, and be doubly cold to the next man he meets by way of mending matters. Not the sort of temperament, this, with which to get on well in the world. Too sensitive and self-accusing a great deal, as I am afraid we shall find before long.

Have you ever met with a serious accident in a foreign country, or felt some illness creeping over you when amongst strangers? If you have, did not a wild yearning seize you to hurry *home*, in spite of all assurances that you would be safer and better tended where you were? If you have not, believe me that it is no use arguing with the stricken one who has this feeling upon him. He craves for *home*,—*home*, no matter how humble it may be;

and staggers thitherward with the unreasoning terror which makes a wounded bird drag itself in torture from the hand that would assuage its pain, to seek some well-known haunt wherein to die.

Well! Home is distant, and the blow has fallen before it can be reached. The sufferer has to praise the All Merciful for a great escape; for the crisis is over and the danger past. But will he admit that it is possible for him to become quite well away from *home*? Does he believe that there can be any medicine so potent for his good as the sight of old familiar scenes, the sound of old familiar voices, the sympathy, above all, of those he loves? I think not! Happy are you if you have never known that weary, incurable disease,—the home-sickness of the sick. I know of poor people who have died in squalid cellars, because they were their *homes*, rather than enter the hospitals, in which they might have been cured in a week. I know of men who have passed all their lives abroad, whose associations, friends, and fame all belong to foreign scenes, but who have tottered back in their old age to the home-land that knows them not,—merely because it is the home-land,—to enrich it with their hard-won wealth, and ask of it nothing but a grave. Ay! we may philosophize, and scoff, and make merry, with these and other human softnesses. Let us crown with bays the clever fellows who are so fond of depicting the morbid anatomy of *homes*,—who delight in tearing down the gay hangings from the walls,—who smash through the gay gilding and the lath-and-plaster, and disclose to us, with many a chuckle of triumph, the hidden closet where the skeleton grins and clanks his horrid bones. Ah, these are something like writers! Their pens are lancets, their ink a fluid caustic, and every printed page a cataplasm. How the great world smarts and simpers as they ply their trade,—each half of it enjoying the discomfiture of the other! I think, though, that there be pure homes and home influences in the land, after all; but, bless my soul! it would be very insipid work to treat only of these. *Eau sucre* is mawkish tipple at the best of times. A squeeze of lemon and a dash of something out of the *garde de vin* improves the flavor wonderfully.

The home-sickness was strong upon Stephen Frankland as the sun went down upon this pleasant July evening, for the home of his boyhood had been a very happy one,—a breezy, crag-bound, leafy, stream-girt home, snugly settled half-way down a Der-

byshire valley, with a great rugged Tor that was always ready to do battle with the north-east wind on its behalf; to its rear, and in all other directions, fat meadow-lands, and hills with dark pine-woods hanging on their slopes; and fern-carpeted dell, and tangled coppices, with the restless Wye lacing all the beauties of the landscape together with a silver thread,—a home in which he had been a free and happy country-lad, revelling in field-sports and feats of strength and daring, which had made him the ready and dashing soldier that he was before the fever struck him down. He has closed his eyes now, in his painful weakness, and the whole panorama floats across his mind's eye. There is the field in which he made that famous double-shot of which his father was so proud. Did he not have preserved and stuffed the two unfortunate partridges who fell victims to his boy's precocious skill? and are they not now hanging up in a glass-case in the hall? There is the quiet pool in the bend of the river into which he used to plunge in the summer time, to the terror of his little brother Frank; and the shady nook, hard by, where afterwards he would loll, half-dressed, all the blazing mid-day, hidden by the tall ferns, reading the lives of the great soldiers and sailors who were his heroes, or half-terrifying, half-delighting, his childish companion with wondrous tales about giants and fairies, and other inhabitants of the dear old realms of Fancy! There, far away to the right, over the grass land, is the fence at which he got that ugly fall out hunting, when he mounted Lord Harkington's new chestnut mare,—merely because some one had said that he could not ride her. The hot, blundering brute bolted with her head in the air, and crashed right into the middle of the double post and rails without rising an inch, rolling over her rider, and nearly killing him in her frantic struggles to rise. There again, close to the house, hanging from the sycamore-tree, is the swing where he and Laura Coleman used to swing each other when they were children together, and where he wished her good-by, and pressed into her reluctant hand a little gold pencil-case as a parting gift the evening before he left for India! There is Bill Grant's, the head-keeper's, cottage. It was in the somewhat musty kitchen of that tenement that he smoked his first pipe, procured from Bill with much diplomacy, and not without a bribe. Ah! will he ever forget that first pipe? At a certain period of its enjoyment, what would he have given to Bill *not* to have

had it? There, close by the privet hedge on the lawn, is old Ponto's grave. Poor old Ponto! Would he have been a better dog, in his life, if he had known what a grand funeral he was to have when all was over? There is the wood,—that on the hill yonder, near the bean-field, where they had that tough tussle with the poachers on Christmas-Eve! And there—there—there! far and near, all around, is some spot full of old recollections for Stephen Frankland, on which his memory loves to dwell. It dwells on them, and those with whom they are associated, as they were in the careless old times which are stamped on his mind. He cannot realize them as they are. He has heard that Bill Grant is not head-keeper now. The poor fellow has had a paralytic stroke, and is a hopeless cripple; still his pupil finds himself planning a long day's shooting, which he intends to have in company with his old tutor in woodcraft, directly the season comes round again. He cannot think of Laura as a grown-up woman who has been engaged to be married. She is ever, for him, the shy, timid child who cried when she was swung too high. And Frank, his little brother! the loved companion of all his expeditions,—poor, gentle, delicate little Frank,—whom he has carried for miles upon his shoulders, rather than he should be disappointed of being present at some steeple-chase, or cricket-match, or other sport that he wished to see,—little Frank came of age a year ago! He was but a little boy, and small and weak for his age, when Stephen sailed for India. There was a wide gulf between them then; the one was quite a man, the other still a child. Time had bridged it over now, and the seven and a half years that separated their ages was lost in their mutual manhood. A pleased smile played round Stephen's lips and glistened in his eyes, as he tried to picture little Frank as the great country gentleman, and Justice of the Peace, Deputy-Lieutenant, and High Sheriff of the County,—posts of dignity which letters from home had informed him his brother was soon to fill. For, as will presently appear more distinctly, Frank, though his father's younger son, was sole heir to Tremlett Towers and all its lands, whilst Stephen, the first-born, would inherit a baronetcy, an honorable title attached to very few possessions of any sort for its support.

The idea of envying Frank his good fortune never entered his half-brother's mind; the possibility that Tremlett Towers might not be his home, to come and

go in as he pleased all the days of his life, never occurred to him for a moment. How should it? Never by word, or act, or look, has he been reminded of his position under his father's roof. He knew it well enough; his father had broken it to him long before he left, and I think it reflected much credit on his stepmother that he soon forgot what he was told. Now, perhaps, you begin to see how matters stand. He was his father's companion in all the sports of the field, his *alter ego* with the tenantry and servants. He was his mother's right hand in her garden, the distributor of her bounty in the village, her representative in a dozen different ways; for this lady was not given to exertion, and was fond of doing what she did by deputy. His wishes were always anticipated, his orders never questioned. He was an universal favorite, the bright-eyed, hearty lad! Like all brave men, with a high sense of duty, he thought little of what he had done, otherwise it might have occurred to him that the news of deeds which had won him the highest object of a soldier's ambition, the Cross for Valor, would quite dissipate the clouds with which absence sometimes hides a vacant chair. But, as I said before, the idea from which such a thought would spring never occurred to him. He longed for home with a sick man's longing as the sun went down that July evening. And so vividly did home and home faces come back to him, that it seemed as though he had never really left them, and that the wonders of the strange land in which his lot had been cast, and all its recent horrors, were the baseless fabric of a vision which was passing away.

He was aroused from such day-dreaming by a tap upon the shoulder, and, turning round, saw that a square-built man, with a jolly, weather-beaten face, and dressed in the handsome uniform of the Peninsular and Oriental Company, had taken a seat by his side.

" Glad to see you on deck, Sir!" said the officer. " I am Captain Stevenson, of this ship, at your service. How do you feel yourself to-night—picking up your crumbs, eh? There now, don't move; I've got plenty of room where I am, thank ye!" And the jolly seaman kindly pressed Stephen Frankland back into the reclining position from which he had started, and smoothed the pillow that supported his head.

" Is there anything I can do for you?" he added, when this was done—" anything you want in your cabin?"

" Thank you very much!" Stephen replied; " I have everything I require, and I shall soon cease to be the troublesome fellow that I am sure I must have been to you all. I feel as though every breath of this cool sea-breeze was putting new life into me."

" To be sure," said the Captain; " so it does. Why, I've had young fellows carried aboard further gone than you were—and you hadn't much to spare on this side Davy Jones's locker when we left Calcutta; but, Lord bless you! as soon as ever they can crawl on deck they sit gasping in the fresh air like a shoal of blue-fish, and are on their pins again calling out for bitter beer before we sight Perim!"

" How long shall we be before we sight Perim?" asked the sick man after a pause.

" How long will you be before you get to your bitter beer? you mean," said the Captain with a jovial laugh. " But you will get a chill if you stay out any longer. The wind is freshening, and you have had quite as much of it as you can bear for the first time: the Doctor would tell you so if he were here. You had better turn in, and—Ha! just in the nick of time!" he continued, as a tall figure moved silently out of the shadow of the hatchway, and took its stand by Stephen's side. " Here's your servant come to help you in."

" Hush!" exclaimed the invalid in a quick whisper; " he is not my servant."

Captain Stevenson opened his mouth and raised his eyelids, and so made those expressive features reply—" Who the deuce, then, is he?" as plainly as though he had articulated the words. The question was lost upon the new-comer, so busily was he engaged in collecting the books, cushions, and other articles which fell as the sick man rose and prepared to pass below; but as he rose, he laid his finger on his lip with a meaning look, until the old man had descended the companion-ladder, and then replied in a whisper—

" You will think it very odd, but I know absolutely nothing about him, beyond this—I owe my life to his care! I will try and find out who he is to-night."

CHAPTER II.

HOW CAPTAIN FRANKLAND AND MR. BRANDON COMPARED NOTES.

ARRIVED in his cabin, Stephen Frankland flung himself heavily upon the cot

with an impatient moan. He had only descended some eight or ten steps, and walked as many yards; but so feeble was his state that the exertion, slight as it was, proved almost too much for him. I think the worst part of an illness is when you have gained strength enough to know how weak it has made you. His attendant, who had followed, carefully measured out some tonic medicine, and handed it, without a word. He then placed everything that might be required within his reach, and silently proceeded to set the cabin in order for the night. This done, he was about to retire, when Frankland raised himself, and laid a hand upon his arm —

“Don’t leave me,” he said — “that is, I mean, if you do not want to go on deck again.”

The person thus addressed paused, and held the cabin-door half shut behind him as he turned towards the cot.

“You see I am getting all right again,” Frankland continued, in a cheerful tone. “Yesterday I could scarcely stand, and to-night I have walked ever so far, all by myself. In a very few days I shall be off the sick-list altogether.”

“I am glad to find you so hopeful,” was the grave reply; “take care, though, that you do not over-exert yourself. You know what the Doctor said, and if I stay here with you, you must promise not to talk.”

“That is exactly what I want to do. It’s all bosh saying that I must not talk. Why, I haven’t coughed once for I don’t know how long! I am going to ask you to redeem the promise that you made, I think, two days ago. My head is getting clearer now, and it worries me awfully not to know what has passed. I lay awake all last night trying in vain to recall the past; and I am sure I shall not sleep to-night unless you help me. I do assure you that I am quite strong enough now to hear all you like to tell, — to ask what I so much want to know.”

His attendant closed the door softly, and drawing a trunk close to the cot, seated himself so that the wan detaining hand still rested on his arm.

“Well?”

The sick man was a little disconcerted by that monosyllabic reply to his anxiously urged request, but more so by the sad, searching gaze with which the speaker regarded him.

It was not easy to fix his exact age; his face and figure were so wasted by the ravages of the Indian climate. He looked sixty, at least, but was, probably, some years younger. He was unusually tall

and gaunt, with a square, massive brow, and restless, though earnest eyes. A few flowing locks of iron-gray hair, thrown back from his temples and passed behind each ear, would have given an air of benevolence to almost any other face; but there was a fixed sternness upon his pale features which never left them even whilst he was performing acts of womanly tenderness for his patient, — a sternness which did not reflect anger or dislike, but betokened the absence of all softer feelings from a heart that had once been their home.

Frankland sank back again into a reclining posture as the old man took his seat; and when the hand that had been laid on his slipped downwards, and the arm swung heavily beside the cot, the patient attendant took it in both his own, and regarding it with a strange, cynical smile, pressed it almost tenderly and placed it softly on the coverlet.

There was no light in the cabin, and the shades of evening were rapidly closing in. After waiting some moments to see if his companion would volunteer the information which he so much desired, Stephen again broke the silence which had become painful to him —

“I am afraid,” he said, “that I have lost all count of time. I am conscious that I have been a long time ill, and that you have all along tended me with a care and patience for which I cannot account. I feel that I owe you my life, and do not even know your name.”

“My name is Brandron — John Everett Brandron. I am an uncovenanted servant of the East India Company, if it still exists, and I am going ho —, I am going to England upon leave. I have done for you what any other man would have done for any other man whom he found as I found you.”

“But where *did* you find me? That is what I want to know,” Stephen said in an excited tone, and starting up into a sitting posture. “When was it? — and where? Why am I not with my regiment? How is it that I am here? All this is a blank to me, in which my mind goes wandering till it is lost in distraction.”

“This will never do! Compose yourself, pray, or I must leave you,” said Brandron; “you shall know all you require; but have patience. There now,” he added, as Stephen sank into his former position; “tell me, as quietly as you can, what you can last remember, and I will recount the rest — at least, as far as I know of it.”

" You want to know how I was wounded ? "

" I want to know nothing," the old man replied, with a smile ; " but you must tell me where to begin, or I shall be saying what you know already."

Frankland closed his eyes, and paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. " You have heard," he then said, " of that affair of ours at the Raptee ? "

" Where your regiment and the ——th charged the rebel Sowars in the middle of the river ? Yes."

" Well ; no matter what we did," said Frankland, " or how I got through ; I managed to keep to my saddle, and when poor old Cherry — (that's my charger, I wonder what has become of him ?) — scrambled with me up the opposite bank, I saw some score or so of the enemy forming on the flat ground close by. I collected a few of our fellows, and we rode straight at them — straight through them, by Jove ! too ; and when they scattered right and left, I saw that their leader was Lal Roogee, — a villain whose life I had sworn to have if ever I saw him again ; and so — But I am wandering on too quickly. I must tell you why I made this vow. There was a young cornet of ours, — a dashing, handsome boy, a prime favorite with all of us, and a special chum of mine. His name was Charley Treherne, the only son of a clergyman down in Kent, near Westborough."

Brandron started, and a crimson flush spread for an instant over his pale face.

" What makes you start ? Do you know the family ? "

" No, nor heard of it. I know the country in which they live, that is all — go on."

" Well, Charley was on sick-leave in the hills when the mutiny broke out, and had only just rejoined us at the time of which I am speaking. It was a few days — perhaps a week — before the Raptee business, that he saw the enemy for the first and last time. There was a fort to be taken — one of those that our Government were fools enough to let a set of rascally Rajahs arm and occupy, to turn against us at the very first opportunity. The infantry were, for a wonder, led up to the right side of it — the rear, and we were posted in the front, hidden in a little wood, to cut off the scoundrels in their inevitable bolt. I had dismounted, and was watching the fort through a field-glass — and so was Charley, but he was on horseback. I had not to watch long ! Crack ! went half a dozen shells into the

middle of the place — Crash ! went the gate, blown into lucifer-matches by a powder-bag fixed there by little Teddy Scott, of the Engineers, as coolly as though he were hanging up a picture in the drawing-room. In went three companies of the gallant — rd at one end, and out came about two hundred Pandies at the other, who scattered themselves helter-skelter into the jungle. It was no use charging after *them*. But a better enemy soon came in sight. An entire regiment of horse that had only mutinied a few days before, drew up in good order, and to our intense satisfaction prepared to march off our way. At their head was a man that I had known by sight, and had heard too much of. ' Charley,' I whispered, ' do you see that fellow on the white carb, with a shirt of mail over his tunic ? That's Lal Roogee.'

" And what is the Roogee famous for ? " asked poor Charley, in his playful way.

" 'Hush ! ' I said ; ' this is no joking matter. That is the fiend who killed poor Clayton's young wife. He set fire to her muslin dress, and the devils that were with him hacked her to pieces with their swords, as she ran shrieking through the compound.'

" I shall never forget the expression on Charley's face when he heard those words. The poor lady had been very kind to him when he first came out, and there, proudly riding at the head of the troop that her husband once commanded, was her murderer ! It was as much as I could do to hold the excited boy : he would have ridden out, then and there, single-handed, to cut him down. At last we got the word ' Officers to the front ! ' The word was given to charge, and away we went. It was a regular race ; but my charger stumbled over a fallen tree, and this threw me back almost equal with the men. I then saw that Charley was charging straight on Lal Roogee. I saw his sabre glimmer in the air ; I saw the rebel sower rein back his horse to avoid the stroke ; I saw him wave his sword, as it seemed to me, only *towards* Charley as he whirled by — and then I was in the thick of it myself — doing my duty, I hope — till the recall was sounded. Then my sergeant came up, and, with a tear on his bronzed cheek, told me what had really happened. The apparently idle wave of that practised villain's sword had done deadly work. The sharp curve of the blade had just touched poor Charley's neck, and inflicted a deep wound through which, long before we reached the spot where he fell, he had bled to death. We buried him in the

wood that night ; and I took his sword, a lock of his hair, and a Bible with his mother's name in it, that I found in his pack, to send to his home. I do not know what has become of them. There was a vulgar cant about in England when I left, that, to be a dashing soldier, one must be a *roué* and a scamp. A braver and more promising officer than Charley Treherne never drew sword, and he lived and died a Christian gentleman."

" I think you will find the things you mention among your baggage," said Brandon ; " I especially noticed the Bible in the palanquin with you when — But I, too, am wandering ; go on — what about Lal Roogee ? "

" I cannot say how he escaped that day. We met again, as I have told you, on the banks of the Raptee. I was nearly wild with excitement as it was, but the sight of his black face nearly maddened me. I don't suppose that what followed occupied more than two minutes from first to last, but in this time a host of recollections flashed through my mind. I saw poor Mary Clayton with her little baby on her lap. I heard her putting in a kind word — as she often had done — for the villains who afterwards took away her life. I was at mess, and it was the first night that Charley joined us. I was hunting, shooting, reading, listening in the verandah of our Indian house to his merry songs and ringing laugh ; I was kneeling beside his grave ; I was vowing to avenge him ; — better than that, I was plunging along upon a fresh horse, with only a few yards of level ground between me and the man who had killed him. What exultation I felt as I gained upon him — for this time he did not stand at bay, as the nature of the ground had forced him to do on the former occasion, but was riding for his life. Nearer and nearer I came, till I could see the whites of his evil eyes as he turned and fired one of his long pistols at me. He missed, and the next moment I was on him ! My sword was in the air ; I had risen in my stirrups to give impetus to the stroke, when a sharp pang, like the prick of a pin, ran through my body from head to heel ! Then came a dull, crushing blow, as though a truss of hay had fallen from a height upon my head, and then darkness, — a vague sensation of pain *somewhere*, and a dreary unconsciousness of what was going on until I woke up, as it were, a few days ago, and found myself in this cabin, and you seated there, as you are now, by my side. I must have been cut down from behind."

" So you were," said Brandon, when Frankland had thus concluded his account, " but not by a mortal enemy. You were unhorsered by a sunstroke. In addition to this, those who had charge of you, whoever they were, managed to let you be attacked by jungle fever."

" How do you know ? "

" Because you were very bad with jungle fever when I found you."

" But where did you find me, and when ? "

" On the grand trunk road, seven miles from Agra."

" Will you tell me under what circumstances ? "

" In my own way, if you will not interrupt me. I am a man of few words, and will not keep you long. I was travelling by palqui. My bearers told me there was a palqui on the road before us unattended, and that there was a tiger trying hard to overturn it. I shot that tiger, — I opened that palqui, and there found you in delirium. Your bearers had fled at the sight of the beast, whose skin I will show you one day. I got other bearers, had you carried on to Agra, and gave you over to the Staff Surgeon. He told me that nothing but a sea voyage would save your life, so I brought you to Calcutta, shipped you on board this vessel, and here you are."

" But my leave, — my papers, — my debts ? —"

" Were all settled by an officer of your own regiment, who was at Calcutta, and helped me to get you off. You have two years' leave, and all your baggage is on board. So you see that I have done very little for you. Your way happened to be my way, and we travelled together, — that is all. As for your recovery, — saving your life, as you call it, — that is no business of mine. You have a good constitution, and were lucky enough to fall into the hands of a doctor who left it alone. I have told you all I know. If you want to learn what happened to you between the times of your falling at the Raptee and my finding you near Agra, you must apply to some one else. The probability is that you were sent off about a fortnight after your fall. The rest of the time had been taken up in the journey."

" I want to hear no more," said Frankland ; " I have heard enough to know that I owe you my life twice over. Like you, I am a man of few words in these matters ; words are but poor agents to express the gratitude I feel. I must find other means of paying the deep debt I have incurred ; and there are those in England, Mr. Bran-

dron, who will help me in its discharge. May I ask in what part of England is your home?"

"I have no home. I have been in India twenty years."

"I mean, where do your friends reside?"

"I have no friends. Have I not told you that I have been away twenty years? Before I had left twenty days no one cared to inquire whether I was dead or alive. Yes, there was *one*," he added in a low voice; "but his anxiety about me would have been best satisfied if he had heard that I was dead."

"You speak bitterly."

"I feel bitterly,—that is, when I am fool enough to give way to my feelings, but that is not often."

"Pray, do not misjudge me," said Frankland, touched by the sadness of his tone, and the deepening of the settled melancholy on his face, "or think that I am indulging idle curiosity in pursuing a subject which I see is not a pleasant one; but I must naturally take a deep interest in one to whom I owe so much. I am going to travel overland. A dozen chances may part us any day. Will you not let me know where I shall find you at home,—I mean, where you will stay when you arrive in England?"

"That I cannot do."

"You mean you *will* not," said Frankland, somewhat nettled at what he took for a rebuff. "Be it so, then; I will press you no further."

"I mean," replied Brandron, taking no notice of the impatient gesture with which Frankland had turned from him, "exactly what I say. I cannot tell you where I shall stay when I land in England, because I shall be there so short a time that I shall have no settled abode."

"Where will you go then?"

"Back to India."

"Back to India," exclaimed Frankland, "at your age! I thought"—

"I have only six months' leave," said Brandron, interrupting him. "My superiors imagine that I shall spend it in the hills, and no one is aware that I intended to take this voyage. Were my purpose known in certain quarters, perhaps it might have been defeated. As it is, I take my own course. Deducting the time which will be spent going and returning to my post, I shall have about ten weeks in England. I could do all I have to do in one, and shall probably return as soon as I have done it."

"Do you like India, then? Do you

not care to remain in your own country as long as you can?"

"All places are the same to me," said Brandron, gloomily.

"Then, why this flying visit?"

"Because," replied Brandron with vehemence, a strange light flashing into his eyes as he spoke, "I go to do an act of justice."

Frankland started up, astonished at this sudden change in the manner of his companion, and for the first time he eluded his gaze.

"You have struck a key-note, you see," Brandron said, turning his face aside; "but pray do not dwell upon it. Come, let us change the subject."

"I am most unfortunate in my questions," Frankland rejoined; "but you cannot think that I would intentionally touch upon what would give you pain? I will not offend again."

"You cannot," replied his companion in a gayer manner than he had as yet assumed. "Avoid this one subject, and the more questions you ask me the better I shall be pleased. I have lived so long alone in out-of-the-way places, where I have scarcely seen a white face from one year's end to another, that I have become uncommunicative and gloomy. I cannot change my nature all of a sudden. I was a pleasant companion once, I believe, and may be so again; meanwhile, bear with an old fellow's weakness, and, with one restriction, ask me what you please. It is quite new to meet with any one who takes an interest in me, as you appear to do; and it is a pleasure to gratify it."

"There is one thing I should very much like to ask you," said Frankland, after a pause; "but I am afraid it approaches forbidden ground."

"Never mind, if it does not touch it."

"I hope it will not; if it does, say so, and I will not urge it."

"Go on."

"You tell me that you are going to England to do an act of justice?"

Brandron's brow grew dark.

"Hear me out," Frankland continued quickly, checking the gesture intended to silence him. "Hear me out first. In performing this, you will do one of two things—perhaps both. You will punish some one who has committed an injustice, or you will benefit some one who has been wronged. Which is it?"

"Both."

"Then," replied Frankland quickly, "you will not be, as you say, without a

friend ; for you will win the gratitude and love of the person whose cause you uphold."

"It is too late," said Brandron, sorrowfully ; "too late : years ago it might have been as you say, but now it is too late :" — and pressing the hand which had fallen in sympathy upon his own, he rose with a deep sigh and left the cabin.

The young dragoon regained health and strength rapidly, and soon began to mix with his fellow-passengers, and to join in the pursuits with which they beguiled the monotony of the voyage. In these, the stern companion of his hours of sickness could not take part, for certain mystic reasons, better known to the skilled in Anglo-Indian etiquette than to this ignoramus. It has been whispered to me that there are distinctions between the rank of this officer and that, and that the rules of precedence to be obeyed by Mrs. General A. and Mrs. Resident B., are as subtle and irremovable as the laws of caste among the natives, which those enlightened persons join in deplored. I am not going to enter into details upon this subject, or I shall have Lieutenant-Colonel Capsicum down upon me like a shot. "Why, blank the fellow!" that distinguished officer would cry to his chums in the smoking-room of the Circumnavigators' Club, if the blundering lines were printed in this book, "Blank his insoucience ! Here is a fellow who pretends to write about Indian life and manners, and, blank him, he does not know the most ordinary usages of society !" He does not pretend to any such knowledge, my dear Sir. He only deals with facts in these matters, and leaves his readers to account for them how they may. He only knows that Mr. Brandron was shunned by the ladies and gentlemen in the saloon — Stephen Frankland alone excepted ; and ventures to inquire of the gallant Lieutenant-Colonel, if he had been returning from India in company with an elderly person not very well dressed, but still having the demeanor and manners of a gentleman, who was openly known as one of the "uncovenanted," — whether he would cut in with him at whist, or introduce him to his wife ? The author does not pause for a reply, but goes straight on.

Frankland perceived what was going on a little too late to take the sting out of it. Brandron had ceased those attentions towards him which had led Captain Stephenson to imagine that the grave old man was his servant. This, however, he attributed to the fact that he was no

longer in a condition to require them, and did not notice the altered manner of his friend ; but when the latter hinted, in his cold cynical way, that seeking his society would lower the young officer in the estimation of his new acquaintances, and requested him to let their intimacy die out, all Frankland's warm nature revolted against such a policy and its cause.

"Confound their exclusiveness !" he exclaimed : "may I not choose my own friends ?"

"It is not always wise to do so," said Brandron, dryly.

"You do not want to be friends with me any longer then ?" rejoined Frankland, hurt at his coolness.

"I did not say so."

"But you keep on hinting that we had better not be seen together. I will force myself upon no man ; but I wonder you ever took an interest in me, and acted as you did, if you intended to throw me off like this."

Brandron smiled grimly. "Did you ever fish a fly out of your cream-pot ?" he asked.

"What nonsense !"

"And help him to rub his wings clean on the table-cloth ?"

"What do you mean ?"

"And feel a sort of weakness towards him as though he belonged to you whilst he was weak and crippled, till he got all right again, and buzzed away to join the other flies upon the window ?"

"Well," said Frankland, with a smile, "I might have done such a thing."

"I actually have," Brandron replied ; "metaphorically speaking, I have fished you out of the cream-pot ; I have watched you rub your wings clean ; I have had a sort of weakness towards you whilst you were weak and crippled ; but now you have buzzed away, and joined the other flies, and there's an end of it."

Frankland looked him hard in the face — looked through the cynical grin, and saw that there was a covert smile of kindness on the other side gleaming out like the sun from behind a cloud. He merely said, very quietly, "There is not an end of it — at least so far as the fly is concerned."

Brandron took a turn up and down the deck, and when he came back to where Stephen stood, he laid his hand upon his shoulder without saying a word, but Stephen knew, or thought he knew, what was meant. It was not till the next day that he said, *apropos* of nothing, "Frankland, I do believe that you are an honest

man." What could he have been thinking about in the interim?

"I should be a worthless cur, Sir, if I were not — to you."

"As it is," said Brandron, smiling, "you are only a fly."

"And still on the table-cloth?"

"Well; have it so if you like."

And the subject was never returned to again.

Nor was any allusion made to the topic which had broken off their first conversation in Frankland's cabin, when he had unwittingly touched the mainspring of his friend's melancholy; but he gleaned from subsequent talk that the business that Brandron had in England would take him in the first instance to the neighbourhood of Westborough; and putting this and that together, he was able to account for the start and change of manner which the mention of that place, whilst telling Charley Treherne's sad story, had caused in his auditor. This brought him to think that Brandron might take charge of the relics of the poor boy, and deliver them to his sorrowing parents; and Brandron accepted the commission.

"You see," Frankland said, "they'll have heard all about it by the last mail, and will hardly be in a condition to see anybody just yet. You can just leave the things, or send them, that's all. I will go later, when they will be more prepared to hear what I can tell them. It is a sad loss — poor Charley! But it would be a farce for a stranger like me to offer consolation. Besides, my first duty is to my own family; and every day that brings me nearer to my home, finds me more fidgety to get there." And then he began to tell Brandron of the happy life of his boyhood, and to anticipate the pleasant days he should pass amongst the well-loved faces and unforgotten scenes; but was checked in the midst of his enthusiasm by the cynical smile and almost savage retort which it produced from his auditor. He turned away, vexed with the want of consideration he had displayed in parading his own domestic happiness before one who had not a friend or a home, and never renewed the subject — but Brandron did, some ten days afterwards. By this time they had crossed the desert, and were in sight of Malta.

"You will go straight through France, I suppose?" he inquired.

"Yes, and cross to Folkestone; but, of course, I shall send my heavy luggage round by Southampton."

"And this brother of yours, of whom you

were speaking some time ago, of course he will be there to welcome you?"

"Of course *not*. He does not expect me — no one expects me. How should they? Unless, indeed," Frankland added quickly, "you wrote from India. I could not do so, as you are well aware. Did you write?"

"I did not," replied Brandron; "for at this moment I do not know where your parents live."

"I will show you," said Frankland gaily, "before many days are over. I shall give you just one week to yourself; and then, if you do not come straight to Tremlett Towers, I shall have you taken, and brought there in custody."

A grim smile broke over Brandron's countenance, as he leant over the bulwarks and watched the foam that hissed and curdled in the steamer's wake and was lost in the distance on the calm and trackless sea; but he made no reply; and Frankland having quite made up his own mind upon the point, considered it as settled, and did not refer to it again.

One thing, however, perplexed him a little. In the course of a conversation with Captain Stevenson, shortly after their first interview, he recounted his narrow escape from being devoured alive upon the Agra road, and when he mentioned Brandron's name, "Who's he?" asked the Captain. Stephen replied, that the person whom the Captain had taken to be his servant was so called. Whereupon the Captain flushed up, and declared, that that certainly was not the name under which his passage had been taken; and begging Stephen to accompany him to his cabin, he called for the ship's books, and there it was plainly entered that the occupant of berth No. 36 had described himself as Robert Meynell, merchant, of Calcutta, and that there was no such person as John Everett Brandron, of the uncovenanted civil service, on board. But when Stephen remembered that his friend's visit to England was a secret one, he ceased to attribute any importance to this fact.

Time passed on pleasantly enough, and our travellers were approaching their journey's end very nearly, when Brandron broke a long pause by saying, suddenly,

"Shall I tell you what I am thinking of Frankland?"

"Yes; go on."

"I'm thinking that it would be much more considerate if you were to go in person to Westborough and give old Mr. Treherne his son's sword. It may be that the news of the poor lad's death arrived

by the last mail, and they will be anxious to know many things that you alone can tell them. Of course, I will fulfil my promise if you hold me to it; but it certainly seems to me that you had better come yourself."

"Does it really?"

"It does indeed. It will not delay you more than a day. Besides, — and here comes the selfish part of it, — as the time for carrying out this business of mine approaches, I feel strangely nervous and apprehensive; and though I cannot see how you could possibly help me, I should not be sorry to have a friend at hand. It is your own fault that I am so troublesome," he added, with a smile, "for you have taught me what weary work it is to be all alone. Will you come with me to Westborough, and then I will go with you where you please?"

"How do we get there?"

"The nearest station is Poundbridge, which is on the direct line between Dover and London. We can start thence, — you to Treherne's house, I to my appointment. A few hours will suffice to settle everything, if the man I expect is to his time. At any rate we can resume our journey the next day. Shall it be so?"

Stephen readily assented. Could he do less for a man who had saved his life twice over!

CHAPTER III.

STRANGERS AT WESTBOROUGH.

How dreadful a battle would be if those engaged in it could see the course of every ball, and tell precisely when to expect the cold steel amongst their vitals! And what an unsatisfactory life we should lead in this world of ours, if we knew exactly what dangers and chances, what benefits and disasters, would follow every step we take! We can, indeed, avoid the flaring rockets, hissing shells, and other engines of destruction that advertise their advents in an unmistakable manner upon either field of action, or to which we know that we must expose ourselves if we trespass in forbidden localities. But I think, upon the whole, it is better to move straight forward in the path of duty, and take our chance amongst the hidden missiles. What is the use of dodging, when, perhaps, you dodge away from a

shot that would not have hit you, right into the line of another that will, when, by remaining erect, you might have avoided both? The same thing may happen in the Battle of Life. There are rifle-pits full of expert marksmen in our streets; there are masked batteries before our country-houses. The lover's walk down yonder in the shrubbery is mined under our feet. We can see the hits when our friends fall, and the explosions when the air is full of wreck and ruin. Let us not trouble ourselves about the misses. Every bullet has its billet, and ignorance of which is the very one about to settle our account is bliss indeed. Shall I stay at home? I may make the acquaintance of the girl who is to make delightful the rest of my days, or I may miss the opportunity which is to make me the happiest of men! What shall I do? It will be best, I think, to take things as they come, and go about the ordinary business of the hour without considering its fortuities, or we shall soon become miserable cowards, unwilling to go about at all. So went Stephen Frankland. If he had known what would have been the consequences of his visit to Westborough, he certainly would have given that picturesque village the widest berth, and probably would have been not much better off in the long-run for his escape.

So Stephen went to Westborough, to hand over in person to the sorrowing father the relics of poor Charley Treherne; and, to his surprise, found his usually stern and composed companion becoming painfully nervous and apprehensive as he approached the spot. Twice only during the whole of their voyage from India had Brandron alluded to the serious business, the *act of justice*, as he had called it on board the steamer, to perform which he was paying his flying visit to England. Hitherto he had become very angry and silent when Stephen appeared even to be approaching the subject, but for the last few hours it was hardly ever off his tongue.

"Have you ever had a presentiment of evil, Frankland?" he asked, as they were about to land at Folkestone.

"No, — yes, — Well, sometimes; but I don't know that it was ever fulfilled."

"I have one at this moment, and it is, that as sure as I put my foot on that land, I shall never leave it again."

"Then I most heartily hope it may come true," was Stephen's reply. "Why should you go out to be broiled to death again?"

"Frankland! I am going to put myself in the hands of a man whom I cannot trust,—a man who has managed to silence me for twenty years, and who would not scruple to silence me forever, if he could."

"Tush! my dear Sir. Westborough is in the county of Kent,—not in the Himalaya mountains," replied his friend, gayly. "There's law in the land of England,—and *me*; why not let me assist you in this matter; you may depend upon my discretion, and I'll take good care that you are not wronged."

"No, no," said Brandon, with a sigh that ended in a shudder; "I must go through it by myself,—I must go through it alone. I will do my duty, whatever may be the result. When the time comes I shall be prepared for it: it is only the coming that unsettles me a little."

It was early hours when the train reached Poundbridge, and our travellers found themselves in the inn at Westborough by mid-day. Here Brandon engaged a pleasant, cool little room, overlooking the road, and Stephen Frankland inquired his way to Mr. Treherne's house.

"Well, Sir," said the landlord, "it's about two miles from here, out Fenbury way. I don't know if I'm intruding, Sir; but was you one of the family?"

Stephen replied that he was not.

"Because," resumed his host, "I don't know as he'll see you. He a'n't seen anybody, not even the Squire, since he heard of poor Master Charley's death."

"Then he does know?" said Frankland, quickly.

"Oh, yes! The news came,—Let me see, now,—the news came,—just a fortnight ago; it came in a letter from them as works things in India,—I don't know justly what to call 'em; and it said as Master Charley was dead,—nothing more. The poor old gentleman does take on above a bit; for he thinks,—and it's only likely, too,—that them devils of Seppos got the poor lad prisoner, and tortured him. Ah! he was a nice lad, too, was Master Charley."

This intelligence determined Frankland to go on at once to the Rectory. He could, at least, give the stricken father the slight consolation that his gallant son had died a soldier's death. Imagining that the house would be near at hand, he had dismissed the fly, and was rather posed for a conveyance; for the idea of walking to his destination, be it far or near, is one which rarely occurs to a man who has spent

much time in India. However, the landlord, who did a little farming, solved this difficulty by offering to lend his pony; and Captain Stephen rode out of the stable-yard of the Rising Sun astride upon an animal the sight of which would have spread consternation amongst the ranks of the crack regiment to which he belonged. But though his mount, to use an elegant expression, was a "rum 'un to look at," it was decidedly "a good 'un to go," and trotted along merrily till he brought his rider to where three cross-roads met. Now, he had been told to keep "straight on," and as each of these roads diverged at a considerable angle, he pulled up, and was puzzled which to follow. At last he proceeded down that which seemed to lead in the right direction, and had not gone far, when he saw a woman walking on in front. "All right," he said to himself, "here's some one who will show me the way," and he cantered up towards her. As he approached, she sat down upon the roadside, and began plucking the grass, plaiting it up in a meaningless manner. She was a full-grown woman, dressed in a common blue print, heavy boots, and battered straw bonnet, like one who labors in the fields; but she had the face of a child.

"Please tell me which is the way to Kerden?" asked Stephen.

The woman looked up vaguely.

"Perhaps you don't live about here?" he asked, thinking he might be inquiring of a stranger.

The woman's countenance instantly lit up with a gleam of intelligence.

"I live at the third cottage opposite the well, a mile and a bit from Westborough."

There was a strange accuracy in the address, and it was spoken quickly, as a child would repeat a lesson that she had been taught,—galloping quickly over the beginning, that she might not have time to forget the end.

"Then please show me the way to Kerden Rectory?" Frankland said.

The look of intelligence faded away, and an expression of blank wonder, not unmixed with fear, took its place.

"Can't you tell me where the clergyman lives? Don't you know Mr. Treherne?"

"Yes, yes!" she replied quickly. "Kind Mr. Treherne! why has he not come?" and she started up, and seized Stephen by his coat.

"I do not know what you mean, my good woman," he answered, gently re-

leasing himself from her grasp; "but if you know this gentleman, as you seem to do, surely you can tell me whereabout he lives?"

"It's no use your talking to her," said a gruff voice from behind. "Don't you see she's daft?"

Stephen, startled at the interruption, turned round and saw that he was addressed by a travelling knife-grinder, who stood leaning on his machine on the opposite side of the road. He was not a nice-looking person.

Small black eyes, set deep in his head under lowering brows, — a nose which had been smashed flat in some brawl, and a jaw nearly as wide and as powerful as that of a bull-dog, are not prepossessing features. Moreover, when the new-comer lifted off his fur cap to wipe his brow, it became apparent that the last person who had cut his hair had followed the style adopted in her Majesty's Jails and Houses of Correction, rather than that which Mr. Marsh, of Piccadilly, would recommend. It was clear, too, that the operator's services had recently been in requisition. Bagged and rough, and brutal as he looked, he spoke very kindly, though, to the woman.

"Get thee whoam, Nancy gal," he said. "It's none reet for them to let ye be wandering about this gaît. Ye'll be run over and hurted if ye dusn't mind. Come along a' me. I'll see thee whoam lass, come along a' me."

"Is she quite imbecile?" asked Frankland, now interested in the poor creature.

"I don't know what ye mean be imbecile. She's not roight in her mind, and she never wor. She's no business wi' you, nor you wi' her; and I'm a-going to take her back to where she lives."

"Is that far from here?"

"None so fur, but too fur for her to be abroad these times. There's tramps about harvesting, as 'ud murder her for her boots, poor thing!"

"I was asking her the way to Kernden Rectory," said Stephen, "when you came up. Perhaps you can tell me?"

"Ay, you mun folly us if you loike. We be goin' that road, and when you see old Treherne just tell him, will you," said the knife-grinder fiercely, "that you met Jim Riley, and say that I towd yer that the next time I wor sent to jail it should be for summut, not for nought as last time, — d'ye hear?"

"I should try and get an honest living, and so keep out of jail altogether, if I

were you," said Frankland, kindly, as he rode along at a foot's pace with his guide.

"Would yer!" the man retorted, with a scoff. "And suppose, while you was gettin' an honest living, a policeman should come to your master's shop and say, — 'this 'ere fellow's bin convicted of felony, turn him out?' and you was turned out accordin', and not having brass enough to pay for a night's lodgin', you went to sleep in a shed by the roadside, and was took up for a rogue and a vagabond, and sent to quod for fourteen days, and no one would trust you with work again? What would you do then, if you was me, eh?"

"Is that your own case?"

"Ay, it is; what do you think of it?"

"That it is a hard one. See, my man, here's five shillings for you. That will keep you out of trouble for a day or two. Where are you going now?"

"I've tramped from Maidstone to-day, and when I've seen some one about here as I wants to see," said the knife-grinder, in a mollified tone, as he pocketed the proffered money, "I'm off north, to Sheffield."

"To Sheffield!" said Stephen. "Do you know Durmstone?"

"Ay."

"Well, if you should be passing there and want work — But what are you?"

"A cutler by trade; but I can put my hand to a'most anything if I've a mind."

"Then, if you should go near Durmstone, call at Tremlett Towers and ask for Captain Frankland. I will see what can be done for you. Now, which turning am I to take?"

They had by this time come to the cross lanes where Stephen had missed his way.

"Well; ye'll go down there over the brook, and go forward till ye come to a plantation, when ye mun turn along it to the roight; and as soon as ye get clear of the wood ye'll see church steeple, and when ye see church steeple parson's house won't be far off. Good-day, master, and thank ye! Come along, Nancy lass, gee us yer hand!" saying which he helped the imbecile over a style into a pathway that led across the fields to a row of cottages on the high road, whilst Stephen trotted on.

Into the little garden in front of the third of these cottages Jim Riley led his charge, and knocked at the door; but there was no response. Impatient at the delay, he knocked louder, and presently a woman came running out of the next house.

"Lord bless us!" she exclaimed, "is

that you, Jim ! and Nancy, too ! I'm so glad. She a'n't been in all the mornin', and we was a'most afeerd she was lost."

" Why don't the old 'un take better care on her, then ! " said Riley, gruffly. " She ought to be ashamed of herself—she ought ; lettin' a poor dast thing like her run loose about the place."

" Why, don't you know what has happened ? " asked the neighbor, in a tone of astonishment.

" How should I ? I only came out this mornin'."

" The old 'un's dead."

" Dead ? "

" Died the day before yesterday. Overseer's going to have her buried a Sunday, and they're a-coming to take Nancy there to the work'us to-morrow."

Riley staggered, and almost fell, as he reiterated the word " dead ! " and it was some moments before he recovered his old reckless bearing.

" I must go in. Who's got the key ? " he muttered, at last, in a husky voice.

The neighbor replied that it had been left in her charge, and ran to get it. Riley snatched it roughly from her hand, and let himself into the darkened cottage.

It was a humble place enough, consisting of a kitchen with a tiled floor, and a small sleeping-room above ; but everything about it was wonderfully neat and clean, and there were indications of a refined way of living, here and there, which you could not expect to find under so poor a roof. The little garden in the front, too, was laid out with much good taste, and flowers of a superior class flourished in the well-kept beds.

Riley was evidently no stranger in the little cottage. He strode through the kitchen, opened the door which concealed the narrow stair leading to the sleeping-room, and though it was quite dark, mounted it without pause or stumble, and stood beside the bed. In a while he stood motionless, with ashen lips and loudly-beating heart, gazing upon the form which the white sheet covered but could not conceal. Then he drew the covering aside, and scanned the frigid features closely.

" Dead," he repeated, " dead ! and with strangers and parsons about her to the last, I'll be bound. Curse them ! If I had been free, she'd have told me all ; she said she would before she died. Has she told aught to any one else ? "

The sturdy tramp had passed most of his life upon the road. He had visited many strange places, and seen many strange things. There were few people

who could enlighten Jim Riley upon subjects connected with any one of his multifarious callings. What, then, could it be that he desired so much to hear from a lone woman who had not quitted that quiet Kentish hamlet for nearly twenty years ! What could she have known to interest him ! and why should he look so black and fierce when struck by the thought that her knowledge had been confided to another, before Death laid his cold finger on her lips ! These are knots in my TANGLED SKEIN which we must not now attempt to loosen. The tramp remained lost in thought by the bedside, till poor Nancy, terrified at being left all alone in the gathering darkness, plucked him by the skirt, and told him, in her vague disjointed way, that it was no use, mother would not wake ; she had tried, had shaken her hard, but she would not stir. They must get supper without her.

They were about to do so, when the neighbor already mentioned came in, and told them that it was no use hunting about, all the victuals had been used up the day before ; but if Nancy would come in to her place, the girl was welcome to what she and her old man had got. She also proposed that Nancy should sleep with their children. " One more," said the kind-hearted woman, " won't make no such great difference, and it 'ud scare the poor thing worse than she is to be left alone up there," pointing to the room which Riley had just left. " You, Jim," she added, " can make yourself comfortable here in the arm-chair, and we'll send you a bit of victuals and a drop o' cider presently." Jim Riley was evidently better known than trusted in that locality.

He made no objection whatever to spend the night where he was, and when he had discussed the supper provided by the next-door neighbor, he lit his pipe, and smoked away very contentedly in the dark, till all was quiet and the neighbors on either side had retired to rest. Then he rose ; and from a drawer in his knife-grinding machine, which he had drawn in after him when Nancy went out, he took a lantern, and having lighted it, proceeded to search every nook of the cottage. He made a clean sweep of every shelf, carefully examining each crock and tin before he put it up again ; and when he came to any box or cupboard that was locked, he had recourse again to his machine, which seemed to have the faculty of producing skeleton keys, jemmies, screwdrivers, files,

and other instruments for opening places of security at will.

He found very little of any interest or value until he had opened one of those very palpable depositaries called "secret drawers," in the deceased woman's work-box. There he found a letter, some silver money, a broken brooch, a locket containing the miniature of a young and beautiful girl, a curious old needle-book with covers made of gold, filagree-work, in the centre of which were what seemed to be initials and a crest, but the little shield, upon which they were engraved, was so worn, that more intelligent eyes than Riley possessed could not have deciphered them. The tramp eagerly seized these last-named articles before he saw the letter, but having perceived it, instantly laid them down and opened it. It contained a five-pound Bank of England note, but no other enclosure; was directed to the owner of the work-box, and the post-mark showed that it had come from London, and that she had received it two weeks before her death. Riley knotted up in his handkerchief the brooch, the locket, and the needle-book, left the bank-note and the money in the drawer, and having carefully wrapped the envelop in some leaves which he tore from an old Bible, proceeded with his search. He even went so far as to examine the tiles which composed the floor, to see if any one of them had been recently removed, — and daylight found him still searching.

In the mean time, Frankland had found his way to the Rectory, and as he expected, was denied to the Rector. The young ladies were at home, the servants told him, and Mr. Cuthbert; but "Master could not see any visitors." Further inquiry proved that Mr. Cuthbert was the clergyman's nephew, and to him Stephen sent in his card. Time to deliver it had barely passed when a door was thrown open, and a young man dressed in deep mourning bounded into the hall, and exclaimed:

"What! Steeve!"

Upon which Frankland started, grasped his extended hand, and cried in the same tone, —

"What! Cuddy! Who on earth would have thought of seeing you here!"

"Why, don't you know that Mr. Treherne is my uncle? But what in the name of wonder brings *you* this way? I thought you were in In—. Ah, I see, — poor Charley! Oh! Steeve, is it true?" he asked eagerly.

"I am sorry to say it is, — quite true."

"We had no hope; but I thought I saw

something in your face that roused one for a moment."

"It was pleasure at meeting an old chum so unexpectedly, — nothing more. I can relieve some of your fears respecting the manner of his death; that is all."

"And you have come all this way to tell us! Dear old man! But it is just like you. Don't let us stand here, though. Come in, and I will introduce you to my cousins, and they will break your arrival to my uncle."

Stephen's name had gone before him to the drawing-room. It was a well-known name there, for the lost brother's letters had been full of it. And in their happier hours pretty Gertrude and Maud Treherne had often tried to picture to each other what this stern, honest, tender and hearty Captain, whose praises Charley had never tired of singing, could be like. In playful mood they had drawn fancy portraits of their brother's idol, in which Maud pictured him with superhuman beauty, and represented him in the act of performing prodigies of valor; whilst merry Gertrude delighted to put him into all sorts of ridiculous positions. There is a sheet of drawing-paper extant, upon which various passages in the life of Captain Frankland are spiritedly depicted. The best of these, perhaps, are the sketches entitled "Captain Frankland feels it hot," "Captain Frankland finds it difficult to put on his boots," as well he might, for they are brimful of snakes, — and "Pig-sticking in India," in which a fine boar, mounted upon a showy Arab, is depicted in the act of thrusting his spear into the person of an officer in the uniform of the Bengal Cavalry, who bears a strong likeness to the hero of the other scenes. Ah! they were pleasant days, — those days never to dawn again upon the peaceful Rectory, when the absent one's letters arrived full of the wonders of the strange land in which his lot was cast, to be thus travestied in all love by the sprightly and winsome Gerty. Her younger sister used to protest vehemently against such disparagement of her hero, which interference caused Gerty to declare, that the bare-faced manner in which that young woman, — meaning dear little, timid Maud, — was setting her cap at the Captain, was a disgrace to the family. It will be a long time before the merry laughter which used to accompany these sallies, and the repartees thereto, will be heard again; and it was with a wild throb at their hearts that the sisters sprang forward to meet the object of their former merriment.

"Had he good news?" Grave Stephen Frankland was at his gravest now, and one glance at his face told the quick-witted girls to banish the hope which, as with their cousin, had flashed across their minds at the first mention of the well-known name.

Cuthbert Lindsay began the common form of introduction; but there was no need for that. The frank girls held out their hands to their dead brother's friend before it was well begun, and no one thought of ceremony at such a meeting.

I should like to pass over all that took place when the bereaved father came down to hear the sad story, and the relics of his brave lad had to be produced and wept over in the darkened room, and go on to the evening, when the smart had somewhat died out of the reopened wounds, and all concerned felt more resigned to their loss. Frankland would have ridden back to Poundbridge, and remained there till it was time for him to rejoin Brandron, according to arrangement; but this was not to be heard of. A bed was prepared for him at the Rectory, and his rejection at first of the proffered hospitality seemed to give so much disappointment, that he withdrew it and remained.

He had quite mistaken the course best to be adopted in such cases. He imagined that, the bare facts in his possession once told, he ought carefully to avoid all topics which could remind the mourners of their loss; but he found that they loved to dwell upon the memory of the dead, reminding each other of well-known tales of "dear Charley" as child, and boy, and man, and constantly appealing to their guest if their darling had spoken thus, in India, or had forgotten so-and-so, amongst his soldier friends. When Stephen saw, thus, how their inclinations tended, they had no reason to complain of him as uncommunicative. He recalled every act which reflected credit upon his friend, and faithfully recounted it amidst smiles and tears, till the hours wore away, and the girls reluctantly rose to retire for the night. Then, in answer to some question put by Cuthbert Lindsay, Tremlett Towers was mentioned, and at the sound of those words Gertrude Treherne paused, and, with a little puzzled look in her pretty face, asked, —

"And what do you know of Tremlett Towers?"

"Simply, that I was born there," was Frankland's smiling reply.

"You don't say so! How came that?"

"Because the estate belongs to my father and my family."

"How very odd. Then Sir George Tremlett?" —

"Is my father."

"And Mr. Francis Tremlett?" the inquirer continued, casting a queer look at her sister.

"Is my half-brother."

"Then you will know Mr. Coleman, of Ruxton Court?"

"Excellently well."

"And Grace?" interpolated Maud, quickly.

"No," Frankland replied; "I can't say that I remember any one of that name down there. The names of Coleman's daughters, if I recollect right, are, — Laura, Emily Lavinia, Constance, and Fanny."

"We do not mean any of the Misses Coleman," said Maud, in a disparaging tone; "we mean the dearest, the cleverest, the prettiest and" —

"No, she's not *pretty*," interrupted Gertrude; "she's beautiful."

"Well, then, the most beautiful."

"And the best."

"Oh yes, and" —

"And the queerest girl in the wide world," continued the elder sister, by way of finish.

"Indeed," rejoined the Captain; "and the name of this wonder?"

"Is Grace Lee. She was a parlor-boarder at the school we used to be at. She's much older than we are, — that is, she'll be four-and-twenty on the nineteenth of next February," replied Gertrude; "and for the last two years she has lived at Ruxton Court."

"A relation of the Colemans, perhaps?"

"Well, I don't think so," Gertrude replied. "She is without father or mother, poor darling! and I think her relations have not used her as well as they ought. She was here staying with us all last summer, and how we managed to get on without her when she left I really do not know. Everybody loved her. Even papa's dreadful old clerk. But, oh! Captain Frankland, you can have no idea how queer she is."

"May I ask in what her 'queerness' consists?" asked the Captain with one of his grave smiles.

"Well; I can't exactly tell you, if you put it in that way. She likes what no one else cares about, and she pretends not to care about what everybody likes. Now, when you see her, and say that you have

been here, I dare say she'll try and make you think that we are quite ordinary acquaintances."

"Thus pretending not to care about what everybody likes?" observed the Captain gallantly.

"No, no,—you must not catch me up so; you know I did not mean that. Dear Grace! I wish she were with us now." And the happy recollections associated with the name of her friend, which for the moment had made her forget her sorrow, died away, and repeating their "good-night!" the sisters left the room. Prayers had been read, and Mr. Treherne and the servants had retired some time before.

Then the young men adjourned to the deserted kitchen, to smoke, and Frankland produced some exceedingly muscular cheroots, which Lindsay essayed with a solemnity worthy the occasion. Cuthbert Lindsay and the Captain had been schoolfellows at Rugby, and the system there pursued made them honest, manly fellows, whom everybody liked,—Stephen after some knowing, and Cuddy before they knew him at all. It was impossible to be in the fellow's company for ten minutes without taking a fancy to him. A bright-eyed, wiry, spruce little fellow, with a warm heart and a clear head,—he was in the good books of everybody who had good books for him to be in. There are some people, as you may be aware, who do not provide themselves with stationery of this description. A sparkling, merry little fellow was Cuddy, who spoke the Queen's English plainly upon occasion, and would stick up to friend or foe without casting up the cost of word or blow. For his soul and his body were not in proportion, and being a small man, he was dangerously pugnacious at times. Of course, we do not see him to advantage now as a jolly companion; for although until the news of Charley's death he had seen but little of his uncle and cousins, he was not the man to be in the house with them for a fortnight without feeling deeply for their misfortune. He had been sent there to try and bear them up in their trouble, and he played his part well.

He had not met his old chum for so many years, that it took some time to bring their comparison of notes up to that present speaking; and then, in reply to Stephen's inquiries as to what he was doing and how the world was treating him, he replied that he was a barrister,—that is to say, he had chambers in the Temple which were very complete, and went the

Southern circuit, which was very jolly, but that as yet his briefs were confined to a peculiar order, which he designated as "soup;" but Stephen, knowing that he had a little patrimony of his own which would keep up the complete chambers in Sycamore Court, and provide for the jollities of the Southern circuit, did not chide with him thereat.

With so much to talk about, it was late hours, and more than three or four of the muscular cheroots had melted away into blue smoke, before they separated for the night.

At breakfast the next morning, Stephen remembered his rencontre with Jim Riley, and the message of that worthy to the Rector, which he delivered, with a view of eliciting something of his history.

"Ah," said Mr. Treherne, "he's a bad one,—a very bad one, I am sorry to say."

"There is no truth, then, in his story that he has been unjustly condemned?"

"I am afraid, none; a burglary was committed in a farmhouse near here, and two days afterwards he was found at Seven-Elms in possession of part of the stolen property. It was found hidden in his knife-grinding machine, and the only account that he could give of it was, that some one must have put it there."

"A lame excuse, indeed."

"And a very common one," observed Lindsay. "The generosity of thieves is unbounded. Go to the next county sessions, and you will find that more than sixty per cent of the prisoners will say that they have been presented with the articles which incriminate them, by some utter stranger (of course the real thief)—no doubt as a token of his admiration and esteem,—or else that they have picked them up in some open and frequented thoroughfare. It may be my misfortune," Cuddy continued, "or it may be my fault, but I must confess that I never was presented with a leg of mutton and a brass candlestick by an admiring costermonger in Fleet Street, neither have I ever found somebody else's gold watch secreted in my wig-box. Jim Riley is evidently more lucky."

"There can be no doubt that he was one of the gang," said the Rector; "but as it could not be shown that he was near the place on the night of the burglary, he was convicted only as a guilty receiver of the stolen property. I was in hopes that his long imprisonment would have had a better effect upon his mind. He seems, however, to be incorrigible."

"And I'm sure, papa, you have done

all in your power to keep him honest," said Maud.

"I took an interest in him," the Rector observed, "for his mother's sake. She, poor woman, was a very respectable person, and lived for many years in one of those cottages that you might have seen to the right, before you came to the three cross roads."

"And where has she gone now?"

"To her last account! She died last Wednesday; and I was much grieved to find, when it was too late, that she had sent an urgent message asking me to come to her and receive a communication she wished to make. Some unexplained carelessness in her messenger or my servants prevented my being made aware of this until I had heard of her death."

"Do you know, papa," observed Gertrude, as she handed him his tea, "I cannot help thinking that she wanted to speak to you about that Nancy,—the poor imbecile you spoke to, Captain Frankland, when you lost your way."

"She certainly has been most unfortunate with her children," Frankland observed.

"Most unfortunate," replied the Rector; "I do not know what is to be done with the girl, unless she goes to the County Asylum. It sounds hard to send her there, but perhaps it would be the best thing, after all."

"Has not Mrs. Riley left any money, then, papa?" asked Maud.

The Rector shook his head. "She was a very careful woman; but it is impossible with her earnings that she could have put away anything considerable; the wonder is how she lived as she did on her little stipend; however, we shall see. The neighbors very properly locked up all her drawers and sent me the keys to take care of, and I shall go over either to-day or to-morrow and see how matters stand."

"Pardon me for suggesting," said Frankland, "that as this fellow Riley is such a scoundrel, he might possibly be tempted to make off with any little provision left for his sister, and that it would be as well, as he is on the spot, for some one to take possession of the place at once."

"Why, he's entitled by law to half of her property," said Lindsay, "if the old woman has not left a will leaving it to some one else."

"Well, that's no reason why he should take it all, Cousin Cuthbert, is it?" asked Gertrude. "I am sure," she added, "that Captain Frankland is quite right, and that some one ought to go over directly and

turn that bad fellow out, and give all the money and things they can find to whoever will promise to take care of Nancy for the rest of her life."

"Yes, and get made into an *executor de son tort*," said Cuthbert, glad of an opportunity of displaying the profundity of his legal acquirements to his pretty cousin.

"And who's an *executor de son tort* in the name of wonder?" asked the younger, opening wide her great blue eyes.

"Never you mind, Maud; something very dreadful I can tell you — between a mad bull and the measles — which gets into the house, spoils the dinner, raises the price of hops, upsets the oil bottle on your new dress, and makes you double up your perambulators and bruise your oats. They brought a bill before Parliament to transport it for life and make a present of it to the Emperor of Austria in a gold box; but Lord Derby wants to have a lark with it at Knowsley, and so the Tories are going to move that the bill be read a second time — after goose — on Michaelmas Day."

"When you've quite done talking nonsense, Cuthbert, perhaps you'll hand me the bread?" said the Rector. "Thank you. I certainly agree with Captain Frankland, that immediate steps should be taken to protect this poor girl, and should be much obliged to you, Cuthbert, if you would go over as soon as possible."

"To beard the knife-grinder in his den, — the Riley in his hall? Certainly, if you desire it."

"And pray let them make you that thing with the hard name, if it involves transportation," said Gertrude; "for you're getting very troublesome, — isn't he, Maud?"

"Oh, Gerty, how can you — when only last night you said" —

But Gerty flew at her sister and gagged her fiercely with a piece of worsted-work. So the sentence was not ended, and the speaker all but smothered for commencing it.

"What time are you to call for your friend at Westborough, Steeve?" asked Cuthbert, when order was restored.

"Oh, about four, so as to be in time to catch the Express, if he has done his business."

"And if he has not, shall you go on without him?"

"That depends! I certainly am in rather a hurry to get home, and — But I shall see when I get to the inn."

"Very well, then. Now listen to the orders of the day, a breach of which will subject the offender to all the pains and

penalties of *præmunire*, which are so awful that nobody knows what they are. I go now instanter, to do battle with the knife-grinder. Captain Frankland is to be permitted to smoke one cheroot in the garden without molestation. Then he is to be taken into custody by Sergeant Gertrude and Constable Maud, and sent to hard labor in the church, the schools, the conservatory, to view the pigsties, and other objects of local interest. When sufficiently punished, he is to be brought in to luncheon, and orders given for his high-mettled racer to be at the door at three o'clock, at which hour he must be liberated, and told to make his way to Riley's cottage. There he will find me installed as man in possession, and I will go on to Westborough with him. If he goes to London — he goes, and there's an end of him; if he stays, I'll bring him back here to Kernden, and we'll make a friend of him; which you will perceive to be poetry. Are the arrangements thus elegantly enunciated agreeable to the persons interested? If so, you are requested to stand in a semicircle, to raise your right hands towards the chandelier, and say 'we are,' in chorus."

The stage direction was not obeyed, but the proposed plans were acquiesced in notwithstanding.

Before he left, Cuthbert drew Frankland on one side, and said, "You can't think, Steeve, what a lot of good you've done the dear old governor. He's quite resigned, and comparatively happy, now that he knows what a good little fellow Charley was, and how well he did his duty. It's been an awful bore for you, of course? but we shan't forget your kindness in a hurry — any of us — I can tell you."

Frankland found the time pass very quickly, and parted with the good Rector and his daughters with mutual regret.

"There goes a fine fellow," said Mr. Treherne, as he rode away. "Ah me! my lad would have been such another, — brave, and tender, and true. The home that owns him may well be a happy and a proud one, as mine might have been. Nevertheless, not my will, but *THINE* be done;" and he bowed his head and went his way without a tear.

Cuthbert Lindsay was waiting at the cross-roads when his friend rode up. "I've secured the Lares and Penates of the deceased Riley," he said, "including the cat; and, by Jove! we've all been too hard upon the illustrious Jim. He was in the cottage all night, but has not touched anything that was not his own. I found all the drawers and places, and cupboards,

locked up, just as the neighbors had left them."

"Then he is not so thorough a rascal, after all?"

"No; and the most extraordinary part of it is, that although he has left the movables, he has removed the incumbrances."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, — that he has taken his mad sister away with him, no one knows where. He knocked at the door where she slept, called her out, — they tell me she is always the first up, — and they have gone as the dew-drop is blown from the bough."

"Perhaps they have only left for the day?"

"Perhaps; but it is not usual for people who go out only for the day to pack up and take away every rag that belongs to them, bundled up in a blue and a yellow striped handkerchief."

"You have traced them, then?"

"As far as the turnpike, — no farther. In reply to the keeper's questions, Jim said that he was taking the girl to Sheffield, — where they lived before they came here, — to her grandmother. I believe there is such a place as Sheffield, but the descriptions given me of Jim Riley fill me with the strongest doubts that he ever *could* have had a grandmother."

"Then you ought to give information to the police, and have them followed and brought back."

"What for? To be obliged to let them go again? Not I. This fellow is the girl's nearest relation, and he has a legal right to her custody, of which we cannot deprive him, unless we can prove that he treats her badly; but the evidence of the neighbors is all the other way. No, Steeve, they have gone from your gaze like a beautiful dream, and you can mourn them in vain over valley and stream; only, if you want to catch the Express, look sharp, and get on to Westborough before four o'clock."

So on they went briskly, and soon arrived at the inn. The landlord was at the door leaning against the lentil, and gazing at nothing in particular with a contemplative frown, after the manner of landlords. Of him Frankland instantly inquired if any person had called to see Mr. Brandron; and learned no one, — leastwise, to the landlord's knowledge, — had been near the place since he (the inquirer) left, "excepting, in course, Mr. Jawlings and the other gentlemen who used the bar-parlor regular of a night. Mr. Brandron had got up early, and had

been a-writing all the day ; they would find him in his room." There Frankland sought him, bidding Cuddy to wait a moment or two till he could tell him what their movements would be, and knocked at the door.

There was no reply.

He knocked louder ; still no answer came, and Stephen essayed to open the door. It was locked. A cold tremor, which he could not suppress, ran through him from head to foot, as the forebodings of evil, expressed by his old friend, flashed through his mind. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "can anything have happened to him?" and with one mighty rush he brought his now sturdy shoulders against the panels, and crash went the door into the middle of the apartment.

No one was there !

Lindsay and the landlord, alarmed at the noise, came rushing in, and Stephen had to account as well as he could for his apparently unreasonable violence. "But where was Mr. Brandron?" The landlord could only say that about ten o'clock, as he passed the window to cut some vegetable marrows for the market, he'd "seed him with his eyes" — with what other organs he could have made the observation he did not mention, — "I seed him," he said, "with my eyes a-sittin' at that there table, a-writin' and a-foldin', and a-messin' about with them there bits of paper" — indicating some old letters that the wind had scattered about the floor. Stephen called for wax and a taper, and instantly sealed them up in a packet, so that their contents could not be pried into. But what had become of their owner? His habits were precise and methodical ; and he was clearly not the sort of man to leave his desk open and his papers lying about in a room with an open window, even though he had locked the door and put the key in his pocket. The landlord was utterly unable to account for Frankland's anxiety, and Lindsay could not exactly make out what he feared. Brandron, he said, would be sure to come back directly, as it would soon be time to start for the station. They had better sit down and wait patiently. Frankland did so, — for seven minutes ; then he rose and strode out of the house to make inquiries in the village.

The village was dozing in the bright sunshine, with not even one eye open. It was so at the best of times, when it was on the main road to the fashionable watering-place which lay two or three miles farther on, and was perched upon the top of a

long, long chalky hill, toiling up the which made horse and man thirsty, and not disinclined to stop and take a long breath and something short when they reached its shade. It was not a lively place. I do not mean to say that any one has levelled the hill, — or taken up the church, and the inn, and the two beer-houses, and the butcher's shop, and the baker's (where the post-office was), and the row of thatched cottages with the old-fashioned diamond panes in the windows, behind which four pennyworth of sugar-sticks were exhibited for sale in three pickle-bottles, with a ball of string and a farthing battledoors, — and the lawyer's house (what could they want with a lawyer?), and the seven gentlemen's villas, and the green, the oak-tree, the stocks, and the pump, — and carried them away bodily from off that main road, and the top of that winding hill, and deposited them somewhere else. There they were ! But a railroad had come and skirted the hill, and bored a tunnel through its weakest point, and got on the other side of it, and dashed into the favorite watering-place round a sharp corner, in a manner that seemed to say, — "Holloa ! you're there, are you?" — and thus seemed to have scared the little village that it circumvented into a state of despondency which could not be thrown off. It was still on the high road and the top of the hill ? but what is the use of being on a high road that is superseded, and on the top of a high hill which nobody wants to climb ? So the little village dozed in the sunshine when it shone, — got sulky when the leaves fell and the murky autumn came, and sank into a state of torpor when the winter set in. It had taken no notice of the arrival of the Captain and his friend, and did not trouble itself about the departure of either. It had no tidings to give of Mr. Brandron.

At last Frankland came to the little green just as some boys were liberated from the village-school, and from one of the most intelligent of these he got a clue. He learned that a tall gentleman in black had gone by in the forenoon with another gentleman, whilst they were playing under the shade of the big oak.

"Did they know who the other gentleman was?" "No, they did not. He was a stranger thereabouts, for he had given young Jack Todd sixpence to show him the way to the Rising Sun."

"Did he go in there?" "No, the gentleman who was there saw him through the window as he was coming, and went

out to meet him, and then they walked away quickly together down there."

"Down there" was the road to the church.

"What sort of a gentleman was the other gentleman?"

"Oh! he was a very kind gentleman, — had talked to them about their game; asked why little William Thompson had had his leg cut off, and gave him sixpence too. He was quite a nice gentleman."

Stephen Frankland went back to the Rising Sun much relieved by this information. It was no use trying to catch the Express now; besides, he could not leave until he had seen Brandron, and learned from his own lips that his presentiments were unfounded. He determined, therefore, not to go back to Kernden, and told Cuddy the reason why.

"Well, old man," he said, "you know best. The governor and the girls will be disappointed, that's all; and I don't think you'll be quite as comfortable here as at the Rectory. But if you will take to dry-nursing elderly Indians with wandering propensities, you must accept all the inconveniences of the situation. Give my love to the baby when he comes in, and get him to give you a character as being steady, honest, and obliging. Good-by."

Again Stephen Frankland sat down and tried to "wait patiently." He lit a cheroot, called for something to drink, and drank it. He lit another cheroot when the first was done, called for something to read, and read it. It was a Maidstone journal, a week old; but that did not matter to one only a day returned to England after eight years' absence. To say he read it,—for his eyes followed the printed words column after column,—but if you had snatched the paper from his hand and asked him what he was reading about, he could not have told you. He was in the fidgets; and a man who has the fidgets cannot give up his mind to anything,—not even to fidgeting. He took just trouble to argue himself into the belief that there was no cause for fidgetiness. Brandron he thought had taken it for granted that he was stopping at the Rectory. Had not he (Brandron) prophesied that they would be so glad of his visit,—have so much to ask him; and had not his words proved true? He had met the person he expected, and they had walked on together, — most probably to the fashionable watering-place,—where they would dine, transact their business, and Brandron would be back at,—well, if he came in a fly, about half-past eight, or nine. It was

quite ridiculous for him to anticipate any personal injury from so kind a person as the stranger had been represented to be; and as for money matters, or anything of that kind, the old Indian was shrewd enough to take care of himself. Having thus shown that he had no cause for fidgeting, he was driven by the fidgets out of the house, and vainly attempted to walk them off.

It was now half-past five o'clock. The sun had lost its fiery strength, and the afternoon was a very pleasant one,—just the sort of afternoon upon which a walk through a picturesque part of the country would be a very agreeable relaxation to anybody who had not the fidgets. As it was, Stephen did not find it to his taste, and had not proceeded more than a mile, when he turned back. Perhaps, after all, Brandron would not stay away to dinner, and had returned! The thought made him quicken his pace; and coming to a path by which he thought he could cut off a long bend in the road, he diverged into the fields; and having taken the wrong turning and wandered about vaguely, after the manner of people who try to make short cuts on an unknown country, came at last suddenly upon Riley's cottage. "Now," he said to himself, "it's all right, I know my way," and he sprang over the stile, and began to walk briskly up the lane, homewards. This lane curled about a good deal, and at one of the twists he caught sight of some one walking in front of him. He quickened his steps, and perceived that it was a man,—a well-dressed man; but, he found, too short for Brandron,—perhaps the person who had been with him?

Now, when you are walking in an un-frequented country lane, and each turning that you come to brings you in sight of an individual who is proceeding in the same direction as yourself, till the next shuts him from your view, to be again discovered plodding onward when you turn again, it is excusable for you to be seized with a curiosity to see what that individual is like; at least I hope so; for I have often, under such circumstances, put on a spirt to get a front view of one so journeying. It is so provoking to watch a person's back going on before you mile after mile! Stephen had a better motive than mere inquisitiveness, so he hurried on; and when the sound of his approaching footsteps came within ear-shot of the man in front, he, too, quickened his pace. He evidently did not wish to be overtaken, though he never looked

back to see who followed, and the walk bade fair to end in a race if he had not stumbled and fallen over some loose stones that in his hurry he did not observe on the path. His pursuer was then close at hand. The man rose and turned upon him angrily, as he came up,— and *Stephen and his father stood face to face!*



CHAPTER IV.

SHOWS HOW A NEAR RELATIVE OF OUR HERO "WENT TO THE BAD," AND WHAT BEFELL HIM THERE.

FROM the first pages of a new story are gleaned impressions which have a great effect upon its future success, and it is very provoking to have to devote them to dry matters of detail. But what is to be done? Shall we ask our friends to cruise with us in our new yacht before it has left the stocks? Will it be wise to issue invitations to our grand house-warming before the new mansion is roofed in? I think not. Let us bide our time. We must have patience and read the bill of the play, dull as the information it contains may be, or else, when the prompter tinkles his bell and the curtain rolls up upon Scene I., we shall make all sorts of mistakes about the *dramatis personæ*, and be but ill able to follow the action of the plot.

There is much to be told concerning the early life of George Frankland, the father of our hero, before you can understand the position which he now holds. He was descended from one of those steady-going old country families who formed a class of themselves in the England of the last century, but that have lost much of their individuality in these faster days. There is no Country now, so, how can there be country gentlemen? The railway train, indeed, carries you through woods and fields, and gives you glimpses of cows and sheep, and a farm-house here and there; but all these things do not make Country, as country used to be. They make the places whereon they stand something that is not exactly Town,—that is all! Put your head out of the carriage-window as you are whirled along, and you catch a glimpse of a hedger and a milkmaid meeting in a lane. Well, the hedger takes in a penny newspaper, is learned in politics, has wandered about in London, and has seen the sea. The milkmaid has meat for

dinner every day, and wears a crinoline! When Stephen Frankland's father was a boy, the village near to which he lived, and thousands of others like it, were walled-in against the advancement of new ideas, and defended against assaults upon old ones, as completely as though a line of fortifications, with rigid *douaniers* at every gate, had been established to protect it from improvement from without; and this through no fault of any one in particular, but merely because Town was town, and Country, country. The time had not yet come in which nimble engineers should escalade the old redoubts, send screaming locomotives to batter down the old out-works, and make into one community the people whom space and sedentary habits had split up into tribes and factions full of the mutual distrust and aversion which it is in our nature to feel for what we have not seen, and are not able to understand.

You who are accustomed to have all the news of the world telegraphed to you every morning by breakfast-time, and think nothing of travelling two hundred miles in the day on business or pleasure, would find some difficulty in realizing the sort of existence that generation after generation of the Franklands passed in that quiet Derbyshire valley, and the sort of people amongst whom their rough, but blameless lives were spent. Little did they know, or care, about what was going on in the great world outside the ring fence that enclosed their stony acres; and within that boundary they ruled supreme. They were not rich; they were not courtly; they were not ambitious. They were only thorough-bred Englishmen, brave and loyal, tender and true. At home, they held to the King as long as he held to the law; and abroad, they shed the last drop of their blood in his cause, without stopping to consider whether it was right or wrong. What was it to them what the fighting was about, so that we got the best of it? So, when the Spaniard threatened our coasts, old Guy Frankland melted down his silver and his gold, and, with his seven sons to guard the treasure by the way, rode up to London and laid it at the feet of the Queen, to buy gunpowder for Howard and for Drake to singe the whiskers of the Don withal. Half a century elapsed before another Frankland went that journey, and then it was as Knight of his Shire, to withstand the King in Parliament, and gather together the element of that mighty storm which was to sweep the Stuart blight from the land.

During less stirring times, these brave and loyal gentlemen led eventless lives in

their quiet home,—seldom strayed from it farther than the county town, and then only when some great occasion called for their presence. Their sons were born and their daughters married in the ancient Grange; and such of the heads of the family as died in their beds went to their last account in the quaint old chamber where they had first seen the light. And so Time passed on, and dealt kindly with a race that it had known so long; and great were the rejoicings which in the earliest years of the present century followed the birth of an heir to its lands and honorable name. There were troubled times, in the midst of which the long-expected youngster made his appearance. He was born on the very day on which that most rickety offspring of diplomacy, the Peace of Amiens, was finally broken, and the dogs of war once more let loose; though the news only reached the old Grange in time to throw a damper upon the merry-making at his christening. I dare say he was often frightened into propriety and fits, by the threat that the Corsican Ogre—as it was the fashion to call the “uncle of his nephew”—would have him if he were naughty; and an intimation to any of the inhabitants of his native valley that this dreaded individual was not nine feet high, and did not lead an army that was wholly provisioned upon frogs, would have been met with exclamations of contemptuous incredulity. The world, however, was put to rights, as everybody knows, for ever and ever, by the wise heads that were laid together at Vienna; and old John Frankland was not the only man who thought that the best way to keep clear of the troubles which had produced such a shaking of thrones all over Europe was resolutely to persist in the causes which had produced them, and to see if the earth could not be made to stand still by Act of Parliament. These doctrines he carefully instilled into the mind of his only son; and that youth left school fully prepared to affirm, if not to argue, in any society, that England’s decline and fall would date from the day on which her people were taught to read, given a voice in parliamentary elections, and allowed (without disability) to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences.

It was an evil day for these fine old Tory sentiments, and indeed for teaching of far greater value, when young George Frankland received an invitation from a school chum to spend a few weeks at his father’s house in London; and see, amongst other

sights, the coronation of the “first gentleman in Europe,” and, incidentally, the doors of the Abbey slammed in the face of the “first lady.” Long and earnest, you may be sure, were the discussions upon this important project,—London was such a long way off, the road thither so infested with peril to the goods and purse of the young traveller, and the place itself so dangerous to his moral health. But then, was he not named after the Regent? and would it not be a great thing for him to be able to tell his children that he had seen the crown placed upon his anointed brow? Besides, the Prime Minister, or the Lord Chancellor, or the Archbishop of Canterbury,—ay, or perhaps the King himself,—might catch sight of the handsome boy and take a fancy to him. Can you see the simple old couple, sitting at eve under the great oak, which had changed no more than the hearts that had been won beneath its wide-spread shade years and years ago, and weighing these *pros* and *cons*; can you picture them surrounded by the scenes amongst which they had played as children, wandered as lovers, and passed the quiet years of their happy wedded life without a wish for change,—contemplating with many misgivings the first departure of the child of their old age from the parent nest? Do you require to be told which of these old birds it was who fancied that the great ones of the State could not be under the same roof with her one chick without singling him out for distinction; but who instantly added, that she could not hear of George being made anything that would keep him away from home? In those good old days there was no necessary connection between pocketing public money and earning it. Pass we over the advice and warnings bestowed by these fond parents upon the elated youth, as though they were intimate—good, simple folks—with all the quicksands, rocks, and shoals in the strange waters upon which he was soon to sail; nor detail the stores of articles, of no earthly use to him in the great Metropolis, which were laboriously devised and packed with care for his use. Many a midnight found his mother’s busy fingers at work upon brave apparel, that was to make her boy the finest of the fine. Those gay London *beaux* should grow pale with envy! They should know a Frankland when he came amongst them! Woe is me! In the very first letter that arrived from the wanderer was contained a long tailor’s bill, as his host had said that “really he could not take the boy

abroad in the outlandish clothes which he had brought from home."

The boy was sixteen when he paid that memorable visit, — his companion some two years older; and under the tutelage of this grave philosopher and friend he heard much treason, as it seemed, talked in high places, and caught glimpses of a life very different from the humdrum existence he had led in the old Derbyshire Grange. I do not think that young Harcourt was a bad fellow, as young fellows went, in those days. He too was an only son; and his father, — an idle man of fashion, let him do pretty much as he pleased. He found the *nabobé* of his guest delightful, and lost no opportunity of astonishing him with the wonders and the sins of the town, till he could astonish him no longer; so that, when the weeks of the original leave of absence had been grudgingly extended to months, and at last a peremptory order, accompanied by a stoppage of supplies, brought the truant home, stout old Frankland could hardly recognize his own son in the fine gentleman who sprang from the box-seat of the Manchester coach, and began to give orders about his luggage, in which every fourth word was an oath. He had been taught that he was the "young Squire!" the heir to a rapidly-improving estate, and he "lorded it" accordingly.

It may readily be imagined that he did not find home-life to his taste after the exciting scenes he had left. Everything was bad and wrong, in the old Grange, from a four-post bed to a tea-cup; and its occupants poor uneducated savages, in the eyes of the young wiseacre who had been six months in London. Great was the disturbance of old ways, and the importation of new-fashioned ideas and things, which followed his arrival; and loud and bitter the complaints, on all sides, of what Master George had said or done. Still, I think that in their heart of hearts his parents were proud of their returned prodigal, with his swagger and his strange oaths, his fine dress, and grand talk about Sir Harry This, and Lady Betty That, and the great row which he and Lord Scampery had with the watchmen in St. James's. There was, to be sure, rather a long bill to be paid for the schooling by which these flattering results were produced; but then, coal had been discovered, and successfully worked in several places, upon the estate, and John Frankland had every prospect of dying a rich man. When the young fellow recounted his experiences of town life, a cold shudder ran

through the old folks; and they thanked their stars that they had got their boy back in safety from temptations which their fondest fears had under-estimated. They congratulated each other upon being very well out of a very bad business. There was one thing, however, that troubled them sorely. The conversations and cellar at Mr. Harcourt's house had turned the young fellow against his father's politics and his mother's currant wine. He vehemently protested against the one, and threw a glassful of the other out of the window, when produced as a special treat to revive him after the fatigues of his long journey!

The simple pair expected that the young fellow would settle down again into his old way of living, and were woefully disappointed. He became moody and discontented at home, and only seemed glad when he had found, or made, an excuse for riding away from it — to Manchester, Derby, Doncaster, or Sheffield, where he would stay for days playing the young Squire amongst the horse-boys and sharpers of a second-rate inn. It puzzled John Frankland to conceive how his hopeful obtained funds for the expenses of these excursions. He knew little of the accommodating character of the tribes of Israel, but was soon to learn how familiar they had become with him — at least by name — as the person mentioned in the *post-obit* bonds of his son.

So, black care entered the old Grange, and sat between the good pair upon their now lonely hearth, mounted behind the Squire upon his stout cob, made the waving corn-fields look thin and blighted, changed the burly oxen into thin kine, and filled the bright spring-time with dark and gloomy days. It did not mend matters for the absent object of all this care to be brought home in a chaise from Salford, intoxicated, by a dilapidated gentleman, who claimed fifty guineas as lost to him by the insensible young reprobate on a cock-fight!

In those days parental authority was wont to be rather roughly enforced, especially by old-fashioned people like John Frankland, who had been accustomed to stand uncovered in the presence of their fathers and mothers when they were men of thirty, and to take their word as law from which no appeal existed. The idea that a youngster of nineteen should go about as he pleased and do as he liked, without asking "with your leave, or by your leave," was a novelty to the worthy Squire. It rather amused him at first —

which was a pity, as Master George was emboldened by the immunity which followed his first essays as a profligate, and encouraged to advance still further upon the downward road, from which it was subsequently found impossible to turn him. Come, ladies and gentlemen! draw round, press round, gather round and see the show! Here is a young gentleman going to the Bad; he has accidentally stumbled against one of the devil's footpaths, or has been taken just to see it, you know — nothing more — by a friend. Bless me! how nice and smooth it looks, and what pretty things grow yonder, on either side, just a little way down! Observe, if you please, how — mindful of certain warnings — he turns away, and casually saunters back again to have another look at the forbidden ground. If he only could find some excuse, now, to get rid of his Mentor, and take stock of it a little bit alone! Or, if his friend would come with him a little way! Man is a gregarious animal only in certain respects. We say that we like other people to be as lucky and as successful as ourselves, and we don't mean it; but when we go to the Bad, we are glad of company on the way! It is so consolatory to know that you are not going to be alone in a scrape! George Frankland fell in with a merry caravan of kindred spirits in which Charley Harcourt was a leader, and required very little pressing to accompany them down that same pathway that we have spoken of. Behold them commencing together the descent! How gingerly they tread, — how careful they are to get a good footing, so as to be able to spring back upon the safer territory! They will go just as far as the corner, and not a step beyond! Oh, dear no! not for any consideration! Only, unfortunately, that last slip, which could not be helped, has taken them a little beyond the proposed limit, and it would look so foolish to go back again! Beside, the travelling has become so pleasant, now that they have got a little more accustomed to it; and it is all nonsense to tell them that it is dangerous. They know better! They will be able to find their way back by some by-path that is sure to be met with lower down! — and so forth, and so on, till it ends in a headlong race which cannot be checked, and a crashing fall — head over heels — into the Slough of Despond below.

The measures which old John Frankland took to stop his son in his downward course only urged him forward. He tried to pull him up short all at once, and the

youth turned restive, took the bit between his teeth, and bolted. The sturdy country gentleman spoke very plain English, and was, I am afraid, too honest a man to be a good diplomatist. First, he commanded the rebel to return to his allegiance; then he entreated him, for his mother's sake, to amend; then he swore at him; and then — he knocked him down! The last argument was a clincher. There was no further dispute; and the next they heard of Master George was, that he had started off for London.

The rest is the old story. His father disowned, and determined to disinherit, him. His mother wept over him in secret, and furtively sent off small sums of money, pinched out of her savings, to young Harcourt for her prodigal, with prayers for his recovery — as is the fashion with our English mothers, God bless them! when thus afflicted. Has it not been said elsewhere that Providence never creates a scamp without raising up half a dozen tender, loving women, humbly to advocate his cause and become his patient victims? Has the time yet come when the words may be blotted out?

Wearily passed the days with the old couple, and about once a month John Frankland swore that the lawyer should be sent for "to-morrow" to alter his will, and pass the estate, for the first time for nine generations, out of the direct line. But the morrow that was to do this act of justice never came, until at last the sun dawned upon one which found the good Squire sitting, as was his wont at night, with his great Bible upon his knee, open at the 15th chapter of St. Luke, but quite dead and cold, with a placid smile upon his lips. In his old-fashioned way he had been wont to follow the lines with his forefinger as he read, and this had stiffened upon the words, "But when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." The prodigal was forgotten!

George was at this time travelling on the Continent with his wife. He had run through everything that he could borrow upon his inheritance, and, not having a shilling to support himself — had married. If it be a creditable thing to marry for love when you do not know but that you will have to send the object of your affections to the workhouse for support, let him have all the advantage which his conduct deserves. If there ever was a woman well calculated to redeem a scamp and pull him through his difficulties, that woman

was Hester Frankland — born Grant — the eldest daughter of Captain Trevor Grant, R. N.; but her face was her fortune, and circumstances — carefully concealed by the ardent bridegroom, or the marriage never would have taken place — made it necessary that his honeymoon-trip to Paris should be lengthened into a residence in that capital, notwithstanding that certain officers of the law were most anxious that he should return to the land of his birth and the jurisdiction of the Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. There were too many people, however, interested in the death of old John Frankland to allow of it being long kept a secret from his heir. He came back to London post haste, was instantly arrested for debt, and, under his wife's directions, put his affairs into the hands of an old friend of her father's — a great family solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields — a sharp man and a hearty, well accustomed to wage war with the tribes of Israel on behalf of youthful heirs, and to attend to the careful nursing of invalid estates. It was good to see the honest lawyer dealing with the harpies who had marked out Master George as their prey for life, and sending them out of his office gnashing their teeth with rage at being obliged to receive back their principal with only forty-five per cent. as profit on the loan. Better still to observe the speechless agony of those who had grasped at too much, and were forced to give up their bonds for the price of the stamp to escape a prosecution for usury. Best of all, to see the conscience-stricken debtor tended in the vile sponging-house by his true wife, and carried by her from thence, when his fever had abated, down, by easy stages, to the Derbyshire valley, where another and happier life was to be commenced.

I think that, probably, the very worst thing that can happen to a young fellow with a proclivity towards the Bad, is for him to get lightly out of some scrape which he thinks, and which *ought to be*, a bad one. His escape tempts him to try his luck again — just as winning a heavy stake upon his first throw induces the embryo gambler to go on, although he knows all the odds are against him. The estate had to be heavily encumbered before George Frankland could be got out of the clutches of the Sheriff's officer; but the income of those coal-fields of which we have already heard, under the management of an engineer whom Mr. Coleman the lawyer had sent down to work them, went on increasing in such an absurd manner as to give

him a prospect of being able to pay off all the mortgages, and be a richer man than any of his family before him, ere his eldest son was breeched. Gentle Hester was good enough to delay as little as might be the coming of this good time, and the usual "finest child of his age," &c. &c., who subsequently became Captain Stephen Frankland, was born on the 18th of July, 1830. Now, long-suffering reader, don't you find yourself emerging from the by-paths of this long digression? Bear with me yet a little longer, and the main road will soon be in view.

Old Mrs. Frankland lived just long enough to hear her grandson's first prattle — and then she passed away, glad, I think, to be at rest and join the faithful partner of her happier years. For a time Master George was busy enough with his alterations and improvements; he liked playing the great man dearly, and his life in the old Grange, with his beautiful wife and child, was a blameless and a useful one. It was not to last very long. Within a year of his mother's death Hester found he was growing fidgety, and tired of his new hobbies, so, with her usual good tact, she made no opposition to what she saw was inevitable. Only when he had determined to go to London, just for awhile, to talk matters over with Coleman, she quietly made up her mind to go with him — and she went.

First of all, much against her will, she had to be presented at Court, and to make the acquaintance of the Harcourts, and all the grand people who had petted her handsome husband in his bachelor days. Then having accepted their hospitality, it had, of course, to be returned; and, a dissolution of Parliament having taken place, who so fit to represent his native county in the coming struggle for Reform as the dashing young Whig? The coal-pits had to be worked apace, I promise you, to keep full the purse that had such drains upon it; and they were not lessened when the Bill of 1830 passed, and Lord Grey fulfilled the darling desire of his young supporter by making him a Baronet. Long and earnestly did Hester struggle to win her husband from a course of life that she detested. Political distinction was his ambition now; and this, he supposed, could be gained through the instrumentality of his wine-merchant and confectioner. It was all nonsense Hester's talking about retrenchment, and paying off the mortgages. That would keep for a year or two; it would all come right in the end. The coal-mines would go on improving,

and pay for all—and so, if you will believe me, they did, and I have heard of other properties of a similar nature which are now running a neck-and-neck race with a spendthrift owner, and distancing the constable. There are no diamonds like the black ones, when all goes well in the getting; and Sir George continued his brilliant career, until, one day, a collier struck his pick in the wrong place, and a stream that no one had dreamed of poured in, flooded the pit, burst its way into the lower levels, chasing the panic-stricken miners to death along the dark passages, and, utterly ignoring all attempts to pump it out, made the rich Frankland Colliery into a dismal subterranean lake, from which no shilling of profit was ever again to arise.

In the midst of this hopeless ruin came the heaviest blow of all. George Frankland lost his good, patient, loving wife, and, to his credit be it spoken, he mourned for her like a man. There was no doubt about the extent of his ruin this time. It was the real, unadulterated article; and if it had not been for the allowance made to him by the Court of Chancery for the support of his child, out of the little patrimony that had been settled on the boy through his mother, the new baronet must have begged or stolen for a living—for he had not the wit to work for one—for every stick and stone of his inheritance were eaten up by incumbrances. So great, however, was his talent for getting into scrapes, that neither grief nor poverty could keep him out of hot water. Having nothing else to do, he indulged about this time in an amour, the consequences of which embittered the remainder of his life—as we shall see before long.

Now, old Mr. Coleman, the lawyer, had a son who, about this time, began to manage the business; and this son had a wife who, in all other matters, had long ago begun to manage *him*; and as this lady will not be an unimportant personage in my story, I may as well present her at once. She was a woman with a mission, and that mission was, to marry everybody. She had married her seven sisters; she had married most of her school-friends; she had married herself; and her first care, after taking a fancy to bachelor or spinster, was to find out some one with whom to entangle them in the noose matrimonial. At first this mission was proceeded with upon sentimental grounds. The poor things yearned towards each other, and it was cruel not to bring them together! Later on, when her own household cares

— for the elder Coleman was a frugal old fellow, and liked young people to try their experience and work their way—convinced her that true love was, after all, an imperfect substitute for legs of mutton, she modified her views considerably; and, still bent as resolutely as ever upon putting an end to celibacy amongst all her friends and acquaintances, determined that they should not make any marriages, but *good ones* in the £. s. d. consideration of the term. George Frankland was a prime favorite with the busy lady; and the grass was not green over poor Hester's grave before she began to look out for a rich wife for the interesting and insolvent mourner. "Now, my dear," she said one evening to her lord, "do think if you have not got some very rich client with an only daughter, who would do for poor George!" The possibility of poor George not "doing" for the only daughter did not occur to his well-wisher.

To this and similar requests her spouse had but one reply, "My love! *business!*" By which it was meant that clients, and all pertaining unto them, were things upon which no home influences were to be brought to bear. It was a maxim in the Coleman family that they were to be lodgers in their own houses, but autocrats in "the office." No wives or daughters were allowed to enter the precincts of this somewhat musty domain, and the transactions therein conducted were preserved as secrets to which the boldest did not presume to refer.

But though that one word "*business!*" was plainly understood to mean an unconditional rejection of Mrs. Coleman's petition, it was *business* which after all supplied the very article for which she was in search.

In the spring which followed Hester's decease, Coleman, Son, and Company had a great patent case for trial in Westminster Hall, and "Son" obtained permission to invite one of the parties, a Staffordshire iron-master, to his house in Guildford Street to dinner. He came, and not alone. He had taken the liberty, he said, to bring his little girl, who had come up with him to see the town. This iron-master was not the man to let his light shine under a bushel. He would very soon let you know what he was! He talked money, thought money, clinked sovereigns at you in his breeches pocket, and reckoned up you and yours by what you were worth in pounds, shillings, and pence. Before the cloth was off the table Mrs. Coleman had marked out that little girl as the heiress who was to "do" for poor George.

When the gentlemen had discussed their wine and entered the drawing-room, they found the pair with their arms round each other's waists, as though they had been bosom friends all their lives. The person whom Mr. Tremlett, the iron man, had spoken of as his "little girl," was his niece, a remarkably artificial young lady of eighteen, full of accomplishments and utterly destitute of common sense — afflicted, moreover, with that painful giggling and affectation of superiority which, even in these later days, is not unknown amongst girls who have been accustomed to the homage of a small country-town. Mrs. Coleman expressed herself as taking such an interest in the sweet motherless child; and would her father trust her with them whilst he remained in town, and she (the disinterested matron) would be so happy to take her to the Lady Mayoress's Ball, and the Botanical Fête, by way of showing her the lions? Rough, purse-proud old Tremlett made great fuss over the proffered hospitality, accepting it at last quite as a favor to the Colemans. His lawyer winced as he heard it urged, knowing full well towards what it tended; but the Lady Mayoress's Ball and the Botanical Fête were not to be considered as "business" in any light, so he was compelled to be silent. Tremlett chuckled in his sleeve at getting so well rid of his "little girl" for awhile, for he had ideas of enjoying himself in London, with the carrying out of which that young person's company seriously interfered. No one knew him in the great metropolis, and he could do as he pleased. So Rhoda, the heiress, took up her quarters in Guildford Street. And who danced with her all night at the Mansion House? And who, by some curious coincidence, was entering the gate at Chiswick just as Mrs. Coleman and her young charge drove up? and who found an excuse for calling at the house about every other day, and was invariably pressed to stay and spend the evening, just to look at dear Rhoda's beautiful drawings — just to hear dear Rhoda sing — just to be ready to escort them in case a box at the Opera might be sent, as it sometimes was, at the last moment? Who, but the pale and interesting young baronet, about whose virtues in the midst of hardship and sorrows good Mrs. Coleman was so eloquent! When the patent case was over, and judge and jury had deliberately determined that the man who had spent half his life, and all his fortune, in working out the new process which was saving Mr. Tremlett so much money, had

not the slightest right to profit by the invention, and it was time to get back to Staffordshire, Miss Rhoda begged hard to be allowed to stay a little longer with her dear friends, and, after a good deal of fuss as before, was allowed to do so. Nothing would have induced Mrs. Coleman to pry into her visitor's desk, — but young ladies are so careless; and this one having written "Rhoda Frankland, Lady Frankland" — no doubt to see how it would look — upon a scrap of paper which, somehow or other, fell into the possession of her hostess, that valuable manuscript was handed, with many a nod and smile, to Sir George, who was not slow to act upon the hint it contained.

The course of true love ran very smooth as far as the principal parties were concerned; but, in reply to the long letter to Rhoda's uncle, in which Frankland formally demanded her in marriage, came the iron-master himself, crimson with fury, in a yellow post-chaise, in which he whisked off the weeping bride elect, without even allowing her time to pack up her finery; and he never rested until he had her safe once more amidst his furnaces. "What! his niece, who was wuth (Coketown for worth) her fifty thousand, married to a beggarly baronet whom his foreman could buy up? Not if he knew it!"

Know it he certainly did not, — the contracting parties, assisted by their ally in Guildford Street, took good care of that! But married she determined to be, and to the person thus slightly indicated, as was foretold in a very prettily-written pink note which was found upon her dressing-table one morning about a fortnight after her forced return. She was very sorry indeed to disobey her dear papa, but dearest George was waiting under the window to take her to Scotland, and by the time this was read she should be his wife.

Now Rhoda Tremlett had been made a ward in Chancery upon the death of her parents, and there are inconveniences attached to an elopement with young ladies so circumstanced, which, had Mr. Coleman made his wife a little more acquainted with "business," she might not have allowed her favorite to risk; or, having risked them, would have warned him to keep out of the jurisdiction of the Right Honorable Henry, Baron Brougham, of Brougham, in the County of Westmoreland, Lord High Chancellor of England. As it was, no time was lost in acquainting that high functionary with what had happened to a young lady towards whom he stood in *loco parentis*; and after a short

week's felicity, the radiant bridegroom, committed for contempt of court, had to pass the remainder of his honeymoon a prisoner in the King's Bench ! Rhoda opened wide her languid eyes, and declared that it was really very hard upon poor Georgey. What had he done ? She had been quite as naughty as he ; would they lock her up in a dreadful prison too ? Was Georgey chained up very tight ? and please might she send him his slippers and a bottle of smelling-salts to revive him, poor dear ? Having vented her grief in this heart-broken strain, My Lady carefully strapped a little coat on her Italian greyhound, and took him out for an airing in an open carriage.

Dearest Georgey by no means relished his fate, — which, by the way, would have been shared by the good-natured match-maker, his ally, if the interesting condition in which she annually appeared had not mollified the Chancellor, and concentrated his wrath upon the principal delinquent.

For a man accustomed to change and excitement, who has no internal resource of any kind to pass the time, and to whom his own company is the dullest in the world, a prison-room — furnish it as you will — is a terribly gloomy place. "Poor Georgey" was very ready from the first to submit, and "purge his contempt ;" but the Court of Chancery has but little faith in such sudden conversions, and gave its prisoner every opportunity of ascertaining, by profound meditation, the real state of his feelings. The case was indeed a bad one. Here was a young man who had dissipated what was, in fact, two fortunes, before he was four-and-twenty ; who was a gambler and a ne'er-do-well, and who had run away with a ward of the Court — of course for her money — and married her in defiance of her nearest relative and the law ! Six months' imprisonment was but a light infliction for such conduct ; and at the end of that time it was intimated, that, when the delinquent had executed a post-nuptial settlement that would be satisfactory to his wife's relations, he might petition for his release from durance. It was not an easy thing for him to satisfy his wife's relations, — represented, of course, by her injured uncle. If the angry iron-master had his will, "dearest George" would have left the King's Bench in his coffin, but not otherwise. Fortunately for the prisoner, however, he went a little too far in his opposition, and the Chancellor took the matter into his own hands. The whole of Lady Frankland's property was

settled upon herself for life, and after her death upon her husband, until her eldest son came of age. When this was done, the life-interest in a sum of money which, with good management, would produce about £150 a year, was, after almost superhuman exertions on the part of Mr. Coleman, bestowed upon the Baronet by his wife's trustees.

The old house in Derbyshire had been let for a short time ; but now the mortgagees had foreclosed, and the estates, with the exception of two outlying farms which were entailed, were in the market. Lady Frankland's money had to be invested somehow, and she fancied exceedingly the idea of going down to the old Grange, and playing the grand lady amongst the simple Derbyshire folks. In this, she was ably backed up by Mrs. Coleman. "Don't you see, my dear, that you cannot possibly do better ? If you settle in any other place, you will come as strangers, — there you take your place at once as an old county family." "Bother your old county families ! " the sturdy iron-master exclaimed, when this view was presented to him ; "many of them aint *wuth* nought. I could buy up a dozen like Franklands ! Beggars' lot !" However, as good luck would have it for My Lady's ambition, an eminent conveyancer, to whom the deeds had been submitted, discovered that three hundred years ago somebody had done or omitted something which made a flaw in the title, and consequently the value of the land was seriously depreciated to any one but a Frankland ; and yet a Frankland could have it at the market price, and hold it safely against the world. So the waving corn-fields and the fat pastures, the great, rugged Tor and all it looked down upon — the scenes, as we know, of Captain Stephen's day-dreaming — were knocked down to Lady Frankland's trustees, certain conditions having been arranged between them and the Baronet before they would consent to bid for the property. The conditions were by no means favorable to Sir George ; and in justice to him it must be stated, that the most humiliating items were proposed to him whilst in durance vile, and he was somewhat unfairly held to his acceptance of them when, through no favor of the proposers, he obtained his liberty. He was so thoroughly cowed and broken down in body and mind by that short imprisonment, that if his wife's relations had required him to sweep a crossing for five years, as a penance for his sins, I believe he would have gladly promised to do so

He was one of those people, you see, who never consider the future consequences of an act, provided its first fruits give pleasure or cause a temporary cessation of pain. The conditions actually made came shortly to this: Frankland and the estate were to change names. "If my gal's fortune buys the place," said the iron-master, "it shall be called after her. I'll have no mistake about it. And if her young 'uns expect to get my brass they must bear my name. I'll have no county-familiy it."

So Sir George Frankland became Sir George Tremlett, and his lady's eldest son Francis of that ilk, and it was held a high crime and misdemeanor down on the Derbyshire estate to call the old house — to which a modern front had been added of the most florid Italian style — by any other name than its new one of "Tremlett Towers."

Sir George and Mr. Harcourt remained firm friends — having many weaknesses in common; and it was through the interest of the latter that Stephen obtained his cadetship. His age — suggested in the first pages of this history — will show you what time has elapsed between the changes above mentioned and the year in which our history begins. The quiet Franklands have long been forgotten, and the purse-proud and ostentatious Tremletts reigned in their stead. Mr. Coleman, moderately enriched by the railway mania of 1846, had retired from the active practice of his profession, and built himself a house near "The Towers;" for, having kept himself out of the quarrel between his wife and old Tremlett, he had been appointed to manage the estates; and such was the confidence which the iron-master had in his care and skill, that he transferred to him by will the trusts in Lady Tremlett's marriage settlement, and left him sole executor of the large property which went to swell that lady's wealth. To console the lawyer for forsaken associations, a room, into which no one was allowed to penetrate, was fitted up in the new house, and made as fusty as possible, in imitation of the office in Lincoln's Inn, and "My love, business!" continued to warn his wife off the subjects which pertained to this sanctum.

Now, Mr. Prompter, I think you may ring your bell; for the scene is set, the actors are dressed and in their places; and hark! the big drum is thumping the final notes of the overture. So now we may up with the curtain and begin.

CHAPTER V.

SIR GEORGE TREMLETT LEAVES HOME ON BUSINESS.

I HAVE intimated that the old Grange, which had seen the first and the last of so many generations of Franklands, had to be "improved" to suit the tastes of the new family. In vain was the obstinate iron-master told that it was one of the best specimens of the genuine Tudor-gothic style of architecture in the kingdom. He would reply, that he did not care for Tudor, nor for Gothic neither. Who were they? Rubble and Square of Wolverhampton built his house, he said, and they should build his niece's. *They* were respectable tradesmen, they were; and so Tudor and Gothic might be, for aught he knew, but they should not have *his* money. He evidently thought that the style mentioned was one adopted by some existing firm of builders. He would have nothing to do with their new-fangled fads. Give *him* a nice white wall, plenty of plate-glass in the windows, and green Venetian blinds! He liked a house to stand up square and handsome, right upon the road, so that people could see it — *he* did! That old place down in Derbyshire might do very well for Franklands, and such like; but it was only fit to make servants offices for his gal. So, as I have said, a modern Italian front was added, of which the walls were very white, and the plate-glass of the widest, and the Venetian blinds behind it of the vividest green that could be laid on.

The ancient mansion faced east and west, looking straight over the valley; the new portion partly turned its back upon it, and looked south, — a drive having been made to bring the visitors round to the new entrance. The principal reception-rooms were all in the portion designed by those eminent builders, Messrs. Rubble and Square, and of the remainder only two apartments escaped the doom which old Mr. Tremlett had pronounced. These were what once had been the main hall, and a small chamber with an oriel window at the westernmost extremity of the principal wing. The oak carvings which formed the wainscot of the hall and ornamented its staircase, were recommended to the admiration of the iron-master, and he is reported to have said, that they would look "something like" if painted French white and pecked out with plenty of gilding. It was only when told that they were worth from five to ten pounds

the square foot to sell again in Wardour Street that he saw their beauty, and after this, was wont to brag, amongst his chums, of the carvings "all over heathen mythology and that, you know," which "artist chaps" came to see in his gal's house.

The old hall was changed into a billiard-room, and My Lady appropriated, as her boudoir, the cosey little chamber with the oriel window. It was such an accommodating little room — so cool in summer, and snug when the cold weather set in ! My Lady could not bear the cold weather. My Lady had a rooted aversion to being warm. The room with the oriel window was a quiet, sleepy, indolent place, and suited Rhoda Lady Tremlett exactly. As a girl, she had had her ears boxed for daring to do something for herself; and under her fond purse-proud uncle's tuition she soon got over the weakness of self-dependence, and learned to do nothing, at all with infinite grace and great assiduity.

A lady's age is a mystery which politeness forbids us to fathom too nearly. We know, however, that Miss Rhoda took that secret trip to Gretna Green when she was, in the estimation of the law, "an infant;" and a remarkably fascinating and superbly-attired infant she was. We likewise are aware that Lady Tremlett's eldest son is two-and-twenty at the commencement of this story, which — (bother take all these details !) — has hardly yet commenced. We may gather, therefore, that she is no longer young. She must be every day of forty, and yet she looks quite girlish of a morning, in her elegant morning wrapper of clear muslin fastened round her waist with a blue sash, and her fair hair gathered up into a coquettish knot of curls. She is wonderfully well preserved — complexion, figure, and all. It would be curious if she were not. What has she to make her look old before her time ! Care killed a cat, we know, and cats have nine lives; but let him do his worst, he will never kill My Lady, though she has only one.

It was breakfast time at Tremlett Towers, and the letters which had come by the morning post for the family were laid out, with the cold beef and fowls, upon the glittering sideboard. There were one or two feminine-looking epistles for Lady Tremlett; some newspapers, several reports of charitable institutions, pamphlets, and letters from Oxford friends for Mr. Francis; and for Sir George a whole pack of communications, which looked painfully

like tradesmen's bills — all but one, which was rather peculiar. It was a large sheet of common rough paper folded together in a very inartistic manner, and sealed with the impression of the top of a thimble. The direction — written in an illiterate hand — was *"To Mr. Sir George Frankland, Care of Attorney Coleman Linkeens Inn London."* A pen had been struck through the address, and "Tremlett Towers, Derbyshire," substituted in a bold clerical hand.

Now, it is three-and-twenty years since Her Majesty permitted the Baronet to take his wife's name; and although the firm of Coleman, Son, and Co. exists to this day, the last Coleman retired fourteen years ago. It was clear, therefore, that the writer of this strange epistle had not been in communication with Sir George during all this time; and if it had not been that one of the partners in the present firm remembered to have heard of the baronet when he was serving his clerkship, and hunted his direction out of an old diary — it would probably never have reached its destination. There, however, it was, in the hands of the stately butler at Tremlett Towers, who, after careful examination of what had been scratched out, the seal, and the folding — which was effective, if not symmetrical — showed it to the second footman, and pronounced it to be "a rum 'un." The second footman, who was young in the service, scanned it in turn, and expected it was "a begging-letter;" whereupon the butler, who knew a thing or two, laughed, and observed that "there aint much good in sending begging-letters to *him*" — meaning by "him" the baronet, his master.

Lady Tremlett and her son made their appearance, gathered up their correspondence, and were seated at table, before Sir George came bustling in. As was his wont, he hummed a tune, and began to collect his letters mechanically — for their general purport was too well known to this man of title and position who has £150 a year independent of his wife, and he found little pleasure in their perusal. But when his eye fell on that dirty, blotted scrawl, he seized it, shuffled it under some other letters, got very red in the face, then very white, and cold all over, and finally managed to enfold the mysterious epistle in his handkerchief and thrust both deep into his pocket. When he sat down to breakfast he was more than usually cheerful, and anxious to know "the news" from his wife and son; but his appetite was not as good as usual this morning. The meal concluded,

he hurried away to a back room where he kept his boots and fishing-tackle, and which he called his Study, and there, after having carefully locked the door and drawn down the window-blinds, he tore open the letter, and read it eagerly. "My God!" he exclaimed, "if I had been away, and she had opened it!" Then he rent it into a score of fragments, and threw them into the empty grate — for it was summer time — and as they fluttered and fell, a word or part of a word caught his eye; so he knelt down, swept them all together with trembling hand into a heap, and burnt them to ashes with a cigar light. If his nearest friend had seen the ghastly face that the Vesuvian lighted up, he could scarcely have recognized it! This done, he rose, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, then paced up and down the apartment moodily, and at last sank into his easy-chair, and, burying his face in his hands, moaned aloud.

Two hours afterwards he knocked at the door of My Lady's boudoir, humming a pleasant tune.

"Come in," said My Lady.

"How deliciously cool and comfortable we are this abominably hot weather," observed the Baronet, in a gay tone, snuffing at some choice flowers which decorated this charming sanctum.

"Did you come to tell me so, my love?" was the languid response.

My Lady was reclining, in white muslin, on a couch by the well-screened window.

"Why, no — not exactly, my dear," said her husband, fidgeting with some ornament on the table; "the fact is, that I have received letters this morning which make it necessary that I should go to London for a few days — about our new railway," he added quickly.

"You know I have not the slightest wish to interfere with your movements," replied My Lady, slightly opening those lustrous blue eyes of hers which, in the mother of a lad of twenty-two, were still most beautiful, — "pray go to London, or anywhere you like."

"Then you don't mind being left?"

"Oh dear, no!"

"And — and — Ha, ha! I — the fact is, that I — am rather short of money just now (this state had been for some time chronic with Sir George), and if you could lend me ten pounds until — Yes, I know. Thank you very much, my love!"

These last observations were made in consequence of a lazy gesture made by

My Lady towards her canterbury, directly her spouse mentioned the mystic word "money."

Sir George wheeled the canterbury to her side with a quickness which showed that the performance had been well rehearsed.

"Ha! and this little fellow is the key," he said, selecting one from a tiny bunch suspended to My Lady's watch-chain, which she handed him. "So it is. Shall I open the drawer? To be sure — this is it! And there they are! Two fives will be most convenient. Thank you, again." And he was about to pocket the money — to which his practised fingers had found their way thus aptly — without further ceremony, when his second son, Mr. Tremlett, entered the room, *without* knocking.

"I have just lent your father ten pounds, Francis," said My Lady; "be good enough to enter them in the accounts."

"In notes or gold, mother?"

"In notes."

"Be good enough to let me see those notes, Sir," demanded his son.

"Fives, my boy — fives. Two of them — it's all right."

"Yes, Francis, two fives, — your father is quite right," said My Lady.

"I beg your pardon," was the filial reply, "it is not all right. When I am intrusted with the keeping of accounts, I choose to keep them in the most systematic and business-like manner. To enter the mere gross sum of a loan is not systematic or business-like, as I understand the terms. I require to take down the date and number of those notes, and therefore request that they may be shown to me for that purpose."

"Francis is quite correct," observed My Lady; "pray show them. Dear boy! his methodical habits are so nice."

The Baronet bit his lip as he handed the notes to this precise young gentleman. Borrowing is not pleasant work under the best circumstances; but when you have to go begging to your wife, with your son to note down the transaction "systematically," it must go greatly against the grain. Sir George Tremlett's necessity, however, was urgent, — and the night mail took him up to London.

It will have appeared, from the conversation which preceded his departure, that "poor delicate little Frank" had grown up a remarkably self-sufficient young gentleman. His course of education had been as follows: He had a private tutor at home till he was fifteen, and then was sent

to a famous public school, at which the principle of making the elder boys responsible for the well-doing of their younger companions was carried out to a considerable length. Mark me, that I have nothing whatever to say against this principle. In theory, it is excellent; and in practice, I know that it has produced many estimable men. But truth compels me to add, that it has also afflicted us with some insufferable prigs, and I am afraid we must include Mr. Francis Tremlett in this category.

Being a determined plodder, and not without ability, he became head of the school, and held that high post for nearly eighteen months. During this period he considered that the temporal and spiritual welfare of some three hundred of his species was placed under his care, and that there was hope for no single one of them without his exertions. In this state of mind he proceeded to Oxford, accompanied by some half a dozen lads of a similar way of thinking, and there encountered some half a dozen more, all earnest disciples of the same school. They were all very steady, all very studious, all very High Church — and, withal, exceedingly egotistical and full of “responsibilities.” They kept themselves by themselves, and would have nothing to say to persons with less elevated missions.

Now, a little coterie like this, into which fresh ideas are not allowed to enter, is apt to get as musty as a little room from which fresh air is excluded; and the well-intentioned exertions of these young gentlemen, guided by no other rules than those which their own want of experience furnished, only escaped being very impertinent when they became ridiculous. For example: — There was, about this time, at Brazennose, a sinner known to his intimates as Jack Cutler — as handsome, dashing, and idle a dog as ever lounged on the banks of Isis. He was the youngest son of a physician at Derby with whom Mr. Francis Tremlett had a slight professional acquaintance, which seemed to him to impose a “responsibility.” Upon the strength of this, and as the delegate of his clique, he visited Jack in his rooms, without an introduction, and informed him that he was doing no good at the university; that the courses he was pursuing would bring nothing but discredit upon his college; that his father was by no means a rich man; and that in throwing away the opportunities afforded him he (Jack, the sinner) was behaving in a fraudulent and ungrateful manner. Home-truths, all

these, which Jack well deserved to hear. They would have come with great force from his tutor, or from the Vice-Chancellor, but from the mouth of a cotemporary — nay, a junior — they were rather hard to put up with. Jack, however, was a very good-natured fellow. He heard his visitor out, and then told him to be good enough to mind his own business, or, as he had come, to take a weed and be cheerful.

Mr. Francis Tremlett indignantly declined so insulting a proposition, and his little set shook their wise heads solemnly over the depravity it evinced, and mourned the fate that threatened all fast men, and Jack Cutler in particular. But the worst of it all was, that Jack took to reading in his last two terms, and was bracketed in honors with his would-be mentor when they went in for their degree! It would have been less galling if the reprobate had taken a first class. Then there would have been no comparisons. But for him to be written down as equal with the studious Mr. F. Tremlett in the second; and for men to say that if he had begun to grind a week or two sooner he would have beaten that prig’s head off — was gall and wormwood to the person thus indicated and his set.

Having left the university, Frank retired to his home; instructed the tenants how to manage their farms; called the gray-haired Rector of the neighboring village of Durmstone roundly to account for the manner in which he conducted his schools; gave his father and other country magistrates lessons in the art of administering justice; and taught various persons old enough to be his grandmother how “to suck eggs” of all sorts and sizes. It will be easily understood, therefore, how it came to pass that he made himself personally offensive to almost everybody upon the estate, gentle or simple. But then, you see, he was the heir, and much had to be excused and put up with in a young fellow who would be so powerful in the days to come. He was quite as precise in his dress as he was in his manner and opinions. He inclined to coats of a grave and sober cut, wore old-fashioned neckties, complained about his digestion, and aped the country gentleman. His father was the younger man of the two in every respect but years. But then, you see, his father had no responsibilities, and so could turn down his collars, wear a shooting-coat in the morning, and drive the dog-cart into Durmstone when he could get leave to take out a horse. Mr. Francis descended

not to such trifling. His set at Oxford were distinguished by their stiff necks, — stiffened by more than starched linen. His set at Oxford always wore long-skirted frock-coats, and left dog-carts to be driven by sinners of the Jack Cutler tribe. So, Mr. Francis Tremlett dressed like a Secretary of State at one-and-twenty, and when he went abroad was driven in his brougham, with a footman to open the door, as be seemed his dignity.

Poor, delicate, affectionate little Frank! Those who expect him to have grown up in the promise of his gentle childhood will be rather disappointed.

Now, how an author may be led astray! A few pages back I was crying out upon those who go skeleton-hunting in gentlemen's houses, and here I have unearthed two out of one covert in my fifth chapter! It only shows that things do not go on pleasantly in pleasant-looking places, as one sometimes supposes they do. There are many, I dare say, who quite envy Sir George Tremlett, and think that he has not a care in that fine house; and yet we know that he is dependent upon his wife and son for his daily bread, and that they take care he shall know it. I have to account for some of the consequences which sprung from this wretched and unnatural state of affairs, and so am bound to disclose it.

Arrived in London, Sir George Tremlett put up at an hotel near the station, and early the next morning hailed a Hansom cab and drove, — not westwards, where the business he had indicated to his wife is transacted, but over London Bridge to the South-Eastern Railway terminus, and took a first-class return ticket for Poundbridge.

It was about four hours after he had arrived there that he met his son, face to face, in Westborough Lane, as already described.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BRANDRON KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT.

SUPPOSING you had a son, and were so confident that he was serving with his regiment in India that you would stake your head against a sugar-plum upon the fact; or, supposing that you had a father, whom for the last four weeks you had been incessantly associating with a family

circle in Derbyshire; and thus positive as to your respective whereabouts, you and this father, or you and this son, were suddenly to come face to face in a secluded Kentish lane, what would you say? — what would you do? Shut this book for a moment, try and realize the situation, and see what words will properly express the feelings of the actors. If you can find them, you are more fortunate than your author. Were he writing a melodrama now, there would be no difficulty. The stage directions would send father and son to opposite corners of the scene, where they would strike attitudes; and the father, clasping his hands to the right, would exclaim, "Ha!" and the son, clasping his hands to the left, would ejaculate, "Heavens!" Whereupon the father would shout, "Can it be? Yes, it is! No, it isn't! Ha! ha! ha! 'Tis he! my long-lost che-ild!" And then, with a stamp, a gurgle, and a rush, they would fall into each other's arms, to resume, as soon as the inevitable applause had ceased, the ordinary business of the play, as though nothing particular had occurred. It is rather hard upon us story-tellers that we are not allowed to make use of fine old cut-and-dried conventionalities of this kind to help us over our difficulties. The truth is so very commonplace! But the truth must be told; and in telling it I have an observation to make. It is not considered right, I believe, to cut down your neighbor's window-curtains, and to make up the material into a dressing-gown for your own wearing; but it is perfectly fair and proper, as things go, to steal your neighbor's novel, and turn it into a play for your own benefit. Should it occur to any of those gentlemen "connected with the Drama," who have been good enough to convert certain of my literary goods, that this story is a good one to be "done" for the stage, they will have to find their own dialogue for this very striking situation; and I warn them, that if the actor who is to undertake the part of Sir George Tremlett should conduct himself towards the actor who is cast for Captain Frankland, — and *vice versa*, — after the manner in which those persons actually behaved to each other in the Westborough lane, those unfortunate performers will certainly be hissed off the stage; for so completely crushed by surprise were the senses of father and son, that they stood stock-still, staring vaguely in each other's faces, and said and did exactly — *nothing*.

During the short space in which Stephen could treat this *rencontre* as a good joke, —

before circumstances, yet to be related, made it the starting-point of a dreadful mystery,—he used to confess, that his first impulse was to run away. "My heart," he said, "gave a great jump up into my throat, — my blood ran boiling hot for a moment from head to heel, and then seemed to flow away from me altogether, leaving me weak and sick, with the hedge and the road waltzing together round me." As for Sir George, he uttered a cry, and fell in a faint where he stood. There was a little stream at hand, and Stephen got some water as soon as he had collected his senses, and, after considerable trouble, succeeded in restoring his father to consciousness. His first words, delivered in a tone of sorrow and reproach, were, "Oh, Steeve! have you followed me?"

Stephen assured him that there was no "following," except for the last few hundred yards; and explained as briefly as he could what had brought him to Westborough. The Baronet seemed to gain composure as the narrative proceeded; and by the time his son had accounted for his share in causing their meeting, he had quite recovered, and began to chatter with his usual vivacity.

"I never was so surprised in my life, — never! And so you have been ill in India — dying. Bless me, why didn't you write? Dear, dear, dear! But you are not looking any the worse, — only a little brown and thin, — that's all. And what splendid weather for the harvest, eh?"

Stephen did not pay much attention to this last observation, or, indeed, to any of its predecessors. He was burning to know what had brought his father so far from home into that secluded spot, and he pressed his questions with perhaps more force than discretion.

"Why am I here?" replied the Baronet; "why, for a constitutional, of course. I cannot do without my constitutional, you know. I am as great a walker as ever, my boy, — bless you!" he added, puffing out his chest and striking it, "I should never have been the man I am if I did not take my constitutional regularly."

"But you have not walked from Derbyshire this afternoon, surely?" said Stephen, smiling.

"Ha, ha, ha! What an idea! Very good, — very good indeed! Walked from Derbyshire! Capital! No, no. I am staying at the Wells. I have been there, — let me see, — I have been there, — I've been there since — the morning. Had business, you know. Finished it by lunch-time, rattled through it quickly, as

usual, and here I am, delighted to see you, my dear boy, — delighted beyond measure, I assure you."

Stephen's brow darkened when he heard the word "business." "May I ask," he said, "if your appointment was with a gentleman from India, named Brandron?"

"Brandron, — Brandron! Oh dear no, — not Brandron. I came to see a particular friend; Mr. — er — Mr. — Dear me, how stupid to forget his name! Mr. — —

"Never mind, as it was not the person I mentioned. I had a reason for asking, but it does not matter. What do you propose to do now?"

"Oh, anything, — nothing! I'm my own master."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. I am staying for the present at the Rising Sun, at Westborough, with my friend Mr. Brandron. I had arranged to go to London with him this afternoon, but he had not returned when I came back from Kernden. He must have arrived by this time. Come with me, — it's only a step from hence. If he is ready to start we can all three go on together. I should like to introduce you to him, for he saved my life. If he is not ready, I will go home straight with you."

"Excellent plan, — excellent!" replied Sir George; "but" — (and he consulted his watch in a very fussy and hurried manner) — "I really have not a moment to lose. I must run away to the station at once, I expect a telegraphic message. I must catch the train, or I don't know what I shall do. I am late as it is. Very sorry to leave you so soon, but time and train, you know, — Good gracious! I shall be late, — Good-by, my dear boy! Come home as soon as possible. How delighted your mother will be, to be sure! Good-by!" And before Stephen could well master his astonishment at these strange contradictions, his father seized his hand, wrung it affectionately, and literally ran away from him.

His own master! Ready to do anything or nothing! Expecting a telegraphic dispatch! Obliged to catch the train! What train! The express was half way to London by that time, and there was not another till eight o'clock. The more Stephen mused over his father's behavior, the less was he able to make it out. He knew, however, that resolution was not among his parent's virtues, and that he was given to rushing hither and thither, full of hurry and importance, to

do nothing at all, and, consequently, was more amused than astonished by it.

In this frame of mind he reached the Rising Sun, and made straight for Brandron's room, fully expecting that he had returned and would there be found. The room was as he had left it—empty. No one had seen or heard anything of Mr. Brandron. It was now nearly seven o'clock, and he had promised to meet him at four. "Oh," thought Stephen, "it's perfectly clear he is dining at the Wells, and will not be in for a couple of hours yet;" and having thus made up his mind that his friend could not be expected, he went out into the road and watched for him anxiously.

Sir George Tremlett hurried away towards the Poundbridge Railway Station, as though he really thought he was going to catch a train, and arrived there very hot and tired with his rapid walk—not out of humor, though, as it seemed, with himself or anybody else, for he buzzed about the place like a great moth, and had something to chatter about with everybody. He had not been there twenty minutes before he had told the booking-clerk, the station-master, the newspaper-boy, the waitresses in the refreshment-room, the man in charge of the electric telegraph, three porters, the policeman, and half a dozen passengers in waiting for the down train, that the arrangements of the line were very inconvenient—very inconvenient, indeed. The idea, he said, of there not being a train till eight o'clock! He should have to spend another night in London, for it would be impossible to catch the Northern Mail. The carriage would be waiting for him at his station—dear, dear!—and one of the horses had a slight cold when he left. He really hoped that William had not forgotten to bring the horse-clothes with him. He was a good servant, William, but very careless sometimes—very careless; and the train would not be there for more than an hour! Dear, dear! He should certainly speak to his friend Mr. Borham Davy. Mr. Borham Davy had great railway influence. Did they—the booking-clerk, the station-master, the newspaper-boy, the waitresses in the refreshment-room, the man in charge of the electric telegraph, the three porters, the policeman, and the passengers waiting for the down train—know his friend, Mr. Borham Davy? No! Indeed! Well, he married one of the Flintdens—the Wiltshire Flintdens—a charming person; and he was a director of a great many lines. He (Sir George) was almost sure that he was a

director of this. He should certainly speak to Mr. Borham Davy about making the trains more convenient.

Into the refreshment-room there soon came some of the boys from the school. With these he immediately entered into conversation—he had a fatal habit of committing himself with boys)—chaffed them about their trencher-caps; asked if the head master was a good hand at caning; felt assured that they did not come for plum-cake; and indulged in other such like twaddle, which we all remember to have despised when at school, but think it necessary to repeat to schoolboys in our wiser years. Then he stood cherry brandy all round, which somewhat modified the opinion which the lads—lads are quick in such cases—had formed of the garrulous gentleman, and then, struck apparently by a sudden thought, called for a sheet of paper and an envelope, and wrote a letter to Stephen Frankland. It ran as follows:—

"**MY DEAREST BOY,**—"I was so charmed and surprised to see you, that I quite forgot to mention that I am not expected at home for a few days. Pray do not arrive in my absence. Could you delay coming until Friday—or say Saturday? Saturday would suit us all admirably.

"Your affectionate father,
"GEORGE TREMLETT."

"**P.S.**—If you write, you need not tell your mother that you met me here. I shall see her myself to-morrow. She might think it unkind of me to stay away after I had completed my London business—that is all, my dear boy. Bless you. G. T."

The person who is responsible for the authorship of the saying, "As easy as lying" could have had little experience in the practice he affected to consider so facile. Easy as lying! Why not as easy as playing the violin, or writing a dictionary, or standing upon your head on a tight rope, or discovering the source of the Nile? To lie consistently is, I take it, about as difficult a thing as a man can attempt. I only wish that a second De Quincey would arise and write us an "Essay upon Lying, considered as one of the Fine Arts;" we should then know then what an important and abstruse science it is. We think it is easy, because we are so tolerant of the bungling efforts of fifth-rate practitioners. How some of us have been called over the coals for presuming to throw discredit upon accounts retailed to

us from the very best authority! With what an air of reproach have we been asked if we think that Mrs. Grundy would tell a falsehood! Of course not, she has only given currency to a set of particulars which, when reason casts a stone into the midst of them, fall to—like the armed men which sprung of old from the dragon's teeth—and knock each other about the head and ears till there is not so much residuum as was left of the Kilkenny cats, to be found of any of them. But it is vulgar, and sometimes dangerous, to throw stones; and so the dragon's progeny march off with fixed bayonets, to stab reputations, to part old friends, and stand sentry at the doors of British Banks and such like shams, investing them with an appearance of stability and grandeur that may not be lightly aspersed. As easy as lying, forsooth! It is easy to hide a lighted candle from a blind man; but is it easy to hide a lighted candle?

I do not think that Sir George Tremlett told lies for the mere sake of lying, or to gain any profitable end. He was one of those shallow-pated people who cannot go straight from one point to another for the life of them, and who think it necessary to surround the commonest occurrences with a veil of mystery.

The man who first said that liars should have good memories was well up to his work. When Stephen's father told his son that big fib about not being expected home for a few days, he knew perfectly well he was going to return forthwith; but he had forgotten all about it by the time that the ink in which his signature was written had dried, and he scribbled that postscript in which he wrote himself down a fibber. Not expected home for a few days, and yet to see his wife, *who was at home*, to-morrow! Oh, Sir George! If Stephen had received such a contradictory epistle when he had leisure to think over its contradictions, they would have cost him no little trouble and annoyance. It came to hand, however, at a time when his mind was full of one dreadful subject, and it merely impressed upon him the wish that he was not to hurry home yet awhile. Had it urged his immediate presence at Tremlett Towers he could not have obeyed the call, and so no harm was done.

The eight o'clock train at last arrived, and Sir George found a vacant place in a first-class carriage, and speedily unburdened his mind to his fellow-passengers concerning the inconvenient arrangements

of the line, and the long time he had to wait; and told them all about careless William, and the horse that had a cold, and the communication he was about to make to his friend, Mr. Borham Davy, who had so much interest in railways, and married one of the Flintdens of Wiltshire.

The chatter only ceased with the journey, and the chattering then hailed a Hansom and drove westward ho! over London Bridge.

Towards London Bridge, twelve hours afterwards, journeyed two travellers, also from the county of Kent. One was a rough-looking fellow, in a faded velveteen shooting-jacket and fur cap, and the other a woman dressed in a common print gown. The man was travel-stained and dreary, and his companion dead beat. He dragged her almost from under the horses' feet, and as she stood scared and motionless on the curb-stone, said, not unkindly, "Come, come, Nancy lass! cheer up! this is London! only a little farther and we shall be where we are going." Whereupon she reiterated vaguely the word "London, London," and added, "I live at the second cottage opposite the well, a mile and a bit from Westborough; please take me home." Poor, witless thing! it was a formula she had been taught to repeat by rote—like a parrot—in case she should ever wander away from her friends and lose herself.

Pardon the apparent brutality of the question, O respectable reader, but if ever you were to do anything for which you might be "wanted"—(you understand what I mean)—where would you fly to hide? Will you go to Paris in twelve hours, and remain there? Alas, there are such things as extradition treaties, and you are not safe from Policeman X on the Boulevards! Will you take ship for Australia? The voyage is a long one, and it would be unpleasant at the end of it to find a detective who had outstripped you in a fast steamer, waiting to take you back before you could land. Besides, it is so easy to watch the ships in the river and the docks, and pounce upon the "wanted" one as he comes on board. I fancy all travelling must be dangerous to people who are "wanted." Every ship—every station, is a trap, and the railway train itself a prison, with those uncomfortable tale-telling wires running all along its course. Well, but, surely a man may walk away in the cool of the evening, and take up his quarters in some quiet country village where nobody knows him, and be

in peace. Be in peace where nobody knows you? My dear sir, you'd be the gossip of the place in four-and-twenty hours. No! when I get into trouble, I will go where no one will notice me, or even see me to pay any attention to what I am, or look like, or do. I shall take a first floor in Regent Street, and dine every day at Simpson's, upon the principle that the wise ones of the earth are always seriously unconscious of what is going on directly under their noses. There were those who were at some trouble to find out where Jim Riley had gone with his idiotic sister. He certainly did not take lodgings in Regent Street, or dine every day at the Divan in the Strand; but he tramped on, and lost himself and Nancy amongst the busy, toiling, heaving, and rattling city, where men had enough to do to attend to their own business without troubling themselves with his.

Sir George Tremlett caught the night mail after all.

In the mean time, Stephen Frankland was watching and waiting at Westborough for his friend Mr. Brandron; and as he watched and waited, the words of the absent man, spoken in his cabin that night when they conversed for the first time, and his strange manner, came vividly back upon Stephen's memory. He could see again the flash which lit up Brandron's usually cold gray eye as he spoke those ominous words, "I go to do *an act of justice!*" an act, as he subsequently admitted, by which an old wrong would be punished and a long-standing injury repaired. When Stephen found that Brandron was not the name in which his preserver's passage had been taken, he remembered what had fallen from him respecting his secret departure from India. "No one," he had said, "is aware that I intended to take this voyage. Were my purpose known in certain quarters, perhaps it might have been defeated." Later on he had acknowledged that he looked forward with nervousness and apprehension to the coming interview, — that it was to be with a man whom he could not trust, a man who had managed to silence him for two-and-twenty years, and who would not scruple to silence him forever, if he could. Those were his very words! This dreaded interview had now taken place. Who was it with? and what had been the result?

Lost in such musing, Stephen Frankland sat under the great oak upon the Green, twisting his tawny mustache and puffing the inevitable cheroot, till the

shadows of the approaching night darkened over the quiet village, and the night itself set in. The stars came out one by one, and the moon rose over the little wood that lay behind the church. Many a time, when a boy at Poundbridge School, have I cut "hockey sticks" in that little wood, and been chased out of it staggering under a load of plunder by indignant "navvies," — a name which the alumni on good Sir Thomas Judd's foundation apply to all aboriginal mankind of the lower orders, unconnected with the school. A pleasant, leafy covert it was; thick with young ash-trees, verdant with open moss-carpeted spaces spread here and there round some giant tree, where the shy rabbits would come out to bask in the sunshine, and, at the sound of a human foot, dart back and be lost to sight in the tangled furze of fern and harebells, couch-grass and foxglove, wild-brier, ivy, and woodbine, that divided them, like a tangled, flowery fringe, from the cool shade of the thicket. Stephen Frankland knew nothing of this wood, but, whilst wandering round the church, came upon it unawares. The moon was at the full, and a nightingale, perched on the topmost spray of a large elm, was filling the night with melody. He was, as we know, in a dreamy, musing frame of mind, so he lazily climbed the stile, and having sauntered into a secluded part of the wood till he came to what had been once used as a saw-pit, sat himself down upon a pile of timber close at hand, and listened to the nightingale long after the songster had flown away. Meditating about his illness, his journey, and his home, and trying to imagine what Brandron was doing at that moment, wherever he was; why should he have noticed in the uncertain light that the ground was cut up and trampled, as though by a struggle, and that the boards which covered up the old saw-pit had been recently moved? He could only have known this by kneeling down, and observing that the ends were not quite replaced on the spots where the grass, that had been hitherto covered by them, grew white and crushed. Had he looked close enough, he would have seen some dark stains upon the herbage, and the print of a hand upon the rotting planks that was not there in the morning.

But he noticed nothing. His mind was not where he sat, but at Tremlett Towers — in the camp at Jansi — in his cabin on board the "Ganges" — at Tremlett Towers again — and at "the Wells," wondering what Brandron could be doing there.

Afterwards he began to reason with himself about Brandron's disappearance. Disappearance? Absurd! The idea of any person "disappearing" in such a country as England, and no one hearing of him again! The thing was preposterous. Had we not police, and constabulary, and railways, and electric telegraphs, and coroners, and private inquiry offices, and habeas corpus, and all the rest of it? Of course we had! And any one of Her Majesty's subjects who flattered himself that he could hide away another, or conceal himself for any improper purpose from the eye of the law and the sure grasp of its myrmidons, would very soon find out his mistake.

So thought Stephen Frankland; and I know there are thousands who share his confidence in the omniscience and penetration of the powers that be. "Murder will out," says the proverb; and it is consolatory to know that if you are murdered some one is pretty sure to swing for it. I believe that we are as quick and certain in the detection of criminals as any of our neighbors, and by no means join with those who, panic-stricken at some late failure of justice, cry out that crime is getting the upper hand of the means for its detection. Still, I am by no means sure that all things are as safe and pleasant as we like to think them. Are all the missing people who are advertised about in the second column of the *Times* cheats, and runaways, and ne'er-do-wells? What is the meaning of those placards, with the ghastly heading "FOUND DEAD," which glare at us from the doors of police-stations and work-houses? The black river has cast up its dreadful burden, as though in horror, on the sedges, and gone shuddering on its course from the horrid spot. Are we *quite* sure that the grinning corpse, that grasps at nothing so vaguely with its distorted fingers, was clothed, when last it stood upright upon the earth, in those wretched dripping rags? Has it never happened that hale men and fair women, whose life was an annuity of love and hope to all around them, have left their pleasant homes for daily avocations, and never returned again? I think that we can reckon up, without much difficulty, a grim category of murders that have *not* come out, and — maybe — will not, to the judgment-day. Who killed Saville Kent? Who placed those bloody remains of mortality upon the coping-stones of Waterloo Bridge? and whose were they? Let us say that these and other similar mysteries are quite exceptional, and lay our heads upon our pillows with the comforting assurance that no other child that has been

found dead in the morning came to a violent and murderous end — that no bones lie mouldering under the dark water, the stone flags of gloomy courts and cellars, or the gay green carpeting of quiet woods, unheard of and undiscovered. It is best not to think too much of such things, if we value our night's rest. Dead men tell no tales; but I think that if the history of the unknown dead ever comes to be written, it will fill many a ghastly volume. Stephen Frankland, musing in the moonlight, seated by that old saw-pit in Westborough wood, had no such uncomfortable doubts. He only thought that his old friend's conduct in staying away so long was rather strange, and that if he did not return that night he was sure to find him somewhere on the morrow. *Somewhere!* — certainly!

He was aroused from this reverie by the striking of the church-clock, and left the spot by the path along which he had come; but paused on the stile to take a last look into the wood.

Nothing was stirring, but the night air amidst the highest branches of the trees. There was no sound but the faint flutter of the leaves. It was almost as light as day, and the moonbeams fell full on the old moss-grown saw-pit. They fell that night upon many another spot as silent, and, to all outward sign, as peaceful. They fell upon green mounds in village church-yards, and upon fields and moorland on which great battles had been fought in times gone by, where the bones of victor and of vanquished crumbled to dust together under the sod. They fell on the calm and glittering ocean, and danced on the unmarked grave of many a gallant mariner. They flitted between the chinks of the closed shutters which had kept the daylight from mocking the slumbers of the honored dead. They flashed upon the dismal charnel-houses of the great city — lit up with a fitful gleam the caves in which hermits had sighed away their useless lives, and glimmered on the horrid holes, the deep morass and sluggish pool, where red-handed murder hides its dead from sight. They lit up the old saw-pit, and Stephen Frankland hurried away towards the inn to seek his friend once more.

He was not there! He had not yet come! There were no tidings of him. Ten o'clock! Midnight! One! Two! chimed forth — and still no footstep, no sound — no tidings. No sleep fell on Frankland's eyes that night. In the morning he was at "The Wells" before the hotels had fairly opened, describing the person of Brandron, and inquiring if

he had been seen there. All was in vain. By noon he had thoroughly exhausted the town, even to its humblest tavern — and no result. Once, indeed, he hoped that he had obtained a clue. The head-waiter at "The Kentish" distinctly recognized the gentleman; he had come in with another party yesterday afternoon, and had dined and slept in the hotel. Was he not a tall party in black? Yes! Well, then, he had had two sodas and brandy, and had gone off to the High Rocks about an hour ago. Stephen drove off to the High Rocks as fast as a hack-fly could carry him, and found a lanky hobledy-boy dressed in mourning, smoking a huge cigar, which seemed to be disagreeing with him, and who acknowledged to staying at "The Kentish," and having had two sodas and brandy for breakfast. Stephen, therefore, had his drive for his pains. Thus occupied, the prevailing impression amongst the natives seemed to be that he was a detective officer from London, and that the object of his search had committed a murder, or was a clerk in some public company who had been driving mail-phaetons and giving dinner parties in the Regent's Park upon £150 a-year. Popular feeling, therefore, was certainly not in his favor. Is the mistrust that we English have of police, and our hatred of anything like spying — though exerted for the detection of crime — a good or a bad sign? The virtue of our mobs is of the most Spartan character. They can hardly be prevented sometimes from tearing a prisoner to pieces, even whilst by that pleasant fiction of our law he has a right to be considered an innocent man. But, let a constable lay a hand upon him roughly, and the attention of the many-headed monster will be turned immediately from the culprit to his captor, and a perfectly harmless official be overwhelmed with execration for doing, perhaps, a necessary act!

Stephen Frankland rode back slowly, and with a heavy heart. He had made up his mind to one of two things: Either Brandron had met with some foul play at the hands of the person with whom he had left Westborough in the morning; or he had given him, Frankland, the slip, for some purpose that he found it impossible to divine. By no other cause could his prolonged absence be accounted for. Disappointed, and weary in body and mind, he tramped on till he came to a bend in the road from which a little inn was in sight, and was surprised to see a crowd round the door. A conviction that it had something to do with the disappearance of

Brandron flashed across his mind, and he quickened his steps. As he approached, and some of the assembly recognized him, there arose a shout, and then a murmur of "Here he is! here he is!" And the people, dividing right and left, made him a clear passage to the door. This was kept by a couple of the county police; and close at hand stood a well-appointed gig, the horse of which was in a perfect lather of foam. The inn itself was in a state of wild confusion. In the passage stood the landlady, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, surrounded by half a dozen village gossips, who did their best to get in everybody's way — each one telling the other to do what he ought to have done himself.

"In God's name, what has happened?" cried Stephen, rushing into the passage.

The constable in charge recognized the voice and manner of command, and touching his hat to the young soldier, replied —

"The gentleman who was missing, Sir, has been found."

Found! Not returned — not brought back; but — FOUND!

There was a dark, fatal, passive sound in the word that made Stephen's blood run cold. Mr. Brandron had left that village, full of health and vigor, was missing — and had been *found!*

He entered the inn, and in a moment the poor homely landlady blurted out the fatal truth.

"Oh Sir!" she cried, "oh Sir! — the poor gentleman — the poor, kind gentleman that nursed my little Teddy! oh Sir, they've robbed and murdered him!"

"Murder I am afraid it will be," said a grave-looking gentleman who at that moment descended the stairs, "as his case is, I fear, quite hopeless; but robbery has not been the motive for the crime. He has a gold watch in his pocket, and his purse with money in it has not been abstracted. No common robber has done this." Then, turning to Stephen, who stood almost paralyzed with horror and surprise, he added, "I presume you are the person spoken of as this gentleman's friend; if so, I should like to have a word with you in private."

"Tell me one thing at once, and quickly," said Stephen; "Where did this happen — where was he found?"

"In an old saw-pit in Westborough wood," was the reply. "He must have lain there insensible all last night and the greater part of yesterday."



CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH A TRIUMPH IS PREPARED
FOR CAPTAIN FRANKLAND, V. C.

I MUST tell you that the fib which Sir George Tremlett wrote to his son was not a gratuitous one. He had a motive that was, upon the whole, a good one. With all his faults and foibles he had one redeeming point: he loved his soldier-boy dearly, and was proud of him. He had little else, poor fellow, to be proud of. The young dragoon bore the good old name that he had weakly given up. If all the ironmasters in Staffordshire could turn their ore into gold, and place it in one glittering heap around the Throne, they could not buy the little bit of bronze that hung on Captain Stephen Frankland's breast. Mr. Francis Tremlett was already a very influential person in his way, and would be a rich man; but the Bayard of India had not yet pressed his hand and said of him, "If all our Officers had been like that young man, Sir, the Well of Cawnpore would have been pure to this day." "No, no! They had taken away his house, his lands, and his name; but the glory of his gallant son was still his own. Of that no one could deprive him. So he resolved that Stephen should have a public reception at Tremlett Towers—a grand one, if possible; but at any rate a reception that would be talked about. Therefore, having accounted with much circumlocution, and I am afraid a fib or two, for knowing that his son had returned, he broached the subject to My Lady, and as usual Mr. Francis Tremlett managed to join in the conversation. It was a curious fact, that My Lady's boudoir door never closed after Sir George but it admitted in less than five minutes afterwards his second son.

Lady Tremlett opened her pretty blue eyes wider than they had been opened for many a day. "Dear Stevie," she said: "I'm so glad! It will be quite a treat to have him home again. But how unkind to go to those Trehernes instead of coming straight to us."

"You see, my love, Kerden Rectory was all in his way," replied her lord, in an apologetic tone. "Besides, it was so good of him to take charge of his poor young friend's sword."

"I really cannot see what clergymen should want with swords," observed My Lady, preevishly. "Was it a very valuable one?"

"I did not see it," said Sir George; "but —"

"I dare say it was not," interrupted his wife. "Of course it was very good-natured of dear Stevie to take so much trouble; but I dare say the carriage cost as much as it was worth."

"No doubt," Mr. Francis Tremlett observed; "but you see there is a sentiment about these sort of things which some people think it right to indulge in. For my part, I think it a very unwise practice to preserve such so-called relics; they only perpetuate feelings of regret, which as Christians it is our duty to smother. Nay, sometimes they cause weak-minded persons to murmur at the decrees of Providence in a manner that is absolutely wicked."

"Dear Francis," said his mother, patting him affectionately on the arm with her jewelled fingers, "how cleverly you speak; you are so very sensible."

Sir George did not appear to join in these commendations. He turned round rather sharply upon his second son, and said, "Suppose your brother had fallen instead of young Treherne in that charge, would you have grudged his stainless sword a place of honor in this house, or failed to appreciate the kindness of a brother officer who would bring it you?"

Mr. Francis flushed a little under this direct appeal, and for a moment was a little disconcerted. His mother came to his rescue; and by the time she had asked Sir George how he could suppose anything so dreadful, and asserted that neither she nor Francis could possibly recover from the shock of losing dearest Stevie, he was quite ready with a speech in reply.

"There is no argument," he said, with more than his usual sententiousness, "that I disapprove of so thoroughly as the *argumentum ad hominem*. I was speaking, as I generally do, upon *principle*. Perhaps, in the confusion of mind which would naturally arise out of such an occurrence (a capital word that, is it not, for the death of a brother on the field of battle?) as you have supposed, I might perhaps give way to a weakness which in calmer moments I should overcome. But this is nothing to the purpose. I have said, and I repeat, that I consider it foolish, and, indeed, irreligious, to preserve things which may keep alive unavailing regrets. It is our duty, as I before intimated, as Christians, not to murmur at the decrees of Providence."

Whilst this little sermon was being de-

livered, Lady Tremlett shook her head in sorrowful assent, and declared that she quite coincided in the opinions so nicely expressed by dearest Francis. Sir George had good reasons for not wishing to annoy that sage of two-and-twenty, and so let his heartless twaddle go uncontested. "Well, well," he said, "it's no use arguing upon imaginary sorrows. Thank God we are spared what poor Mr. Treherne has had to go through. We have the wearer of the sword to welcome home—and—er—yes—" he continued, bustling about the room, and surveying the books upon the table,—"Has any one run away with last week's *Illustrated London News*?"

"Did you expect to find it here, my love? Do you not know, that ever since Francis returned from Oxford he has always filed the back numbers in the library? dear fellow, he is so very neat."

"There is nothing that offends me so much as to see a room littered about with old newspapers," the "dear fellow" remarked. "You will find the number you require with the rest." Another son would probably have offered to get what his father asked for, or, better still, have brought it without offering to do so. This "dear fellow," however, made no sign. Perhaps he objected to the performance of such little filial duties, upon principle. Sir George did not really want the paper. He only mentioned it to bring in, in his roundabout fashion, the subject that was upon his mind. "It is no matter just now; pray do not trouble yourself," he said. But his son had thrown himself back on a lounge, and reclined there gracefully, with the finger-points of either hand brought lightly together in front of his chest—a position common, as I have observed, to the instructors of youth—and appeared to require no such assurance and request to enable him to take his ease.

"I merely mentioned that number of the *Illustrated*," Sir George continued, fidgeting about the room,—peering into this ornament and that, opening and shutting half a dozen books, and examining with much apparent attention things that he had seen fifty thousand times before, as was his wont when he had something to say and had not the heart to say it right out. "I only mentioned that number of the *Illustrated*, my love," he said, "to ask you if you had observed one of the pictures. How very much woodcutting has improved since I was a boy!"

"What picture?"

"Oh!—er—Well, I think it was a—er—little fete at—at—Dear me—

where was it? Oh, I remember, at Thornhill Grange, by Sir Hector Mainwaring, to celebrate the return of his wife's brother, Colonel Trevelyan, from foreign service. Did you read the account? It struck me as such a very nice idea, to call the tenantry and servants together, and give them a little treat to commemorate such an event. It creates so much good feeling amongst the lower orders, when they see a great county family so united and happy,—don't you think so, my dear?"

Now do you see what he is driving at?

My Lady declared there was nothing she enjoyed more than seeing people united and happy. How very foolish people were to be anything else! She remembered the engraving mentioned by Sir George very well; and there was a funny boy in the right-hand corner, who had a head like an egg and no features.

"An accident in the printing, I dare say," observed her husband, "but all the rest was beautifully clear. There was the carriage-and-four in which Colonel Trevelyan had been brought from the station, and the tenantry on horseback, and the laborers waving their hats and shouting, and the band playing 'See the Conquering Hero comes,' and the triumphant arch, with the inscription, 'Welcome to our brave Soldier'—was it not 'welcome to our brave soldier,' my love? Thank you, yes! I think you're right,—inscribed upon it in beautiful cut flowers. Dear me, yes; so it was, and very nice it must have looked. 'Welcome to our brave Soldier' was so appropriate, don't you think so, my dear Rhoda? You see, he had just returned from foreign service, and that capital fellow, Sir Hector Mainwaring, was glad to do him honor for his wife's sake."

"Do not you think, Sir," simpered Mr. Francis—(when he did not preach he simpered, and was always freezingly polite to his father)—"Do not you think, Sir, that it would be as well if you were to ask my mother at once for what you want?"

"For what I want, Francis?"

"My dear father, you must pray excuse me if I speak plain and grammatical English. It is a weakness that my intimacy with Paley and French has brought upon me. I should have said, perhaps, what you wish. It has been plain to me for the last ten minutes that you have introduced the subject of that gathering at Thornhill Grange in order that one of us might suggest the propriety of having a similar

affair here to commemorate my brother's return."

"My dearest Francis!" exclaimed Lady Tremlett; "how very quick you are; you must be a conjuror! And did you"—(this was to Sir George)—"really commence the conversation with this view?"

"Well—er—my sweetest life, I—er—did not exactly; that is, I meant—er—that if you thought—I mean if you liked—er—to set on foot such a thing, why then, of course—er—it would be a great—No, hang it! it would be no more than Stephen deserved;" and he ended with a burst.

"Deserve! Why, he deserves anything, dear boy. I'm so glad you reminded us of this. I should never have thought of it," said Lady Tremlett. "We will give him really a very nice reception, and write to the Editor of the *Illustrated London News* to come and take a drawing of it for his charming paper. Or perhaps Miss Lee would not mind making a sketch; she is so clever! And it might put something in her pocket, poor thing! What would they give her, Francis,—come, you know everything,—for making a sketch of Stephen's return? Seven and sixpence, or ten guineas, or—what?"

Francis gave some answer to this query which is not very important, and I dare say was quite inaccurate, whilst Sir George was bustling about the room, rubbing his hands together, and giving vent to expressions of almost childish delight at the success of his suggestion. Then he drew his chair close up to My Lady's sofa, kissed her hand very gallantly, and taking it in one of his own, patted and stroked it as though it were a little bird that wanted to get away.

"I was quite—quite sure you would be pleased with my idea," he said. "It was so like you to take the initiative—and all of your own accord too! Besides which, you have arranged it so cleverly. So, don't you think, my love—Stephen will be home on Saturday, you know!—that we had better arrange what is to be done? You have only to say the word, my love, that's all. We will not trouble you to exert yourself in any way—Oh no! Now (with a pat at every word) tell me, dearest, what—shall—we—do?"

"Do?" reiterated the languid Rhoda; "why, everything, of course! Won't we, Francis?"

"Much depends," that moral philosopher replied, "upon what you mean by 'everything.' I labor under a difficulty with regard to this proposal, which I will

shortly explain. My brother Stephen, you see, is coming from India. Now, I am not prepared to sanction all that has been done in that country. I have yet to learn that the natives have been treated, during this so-called rebellion, in a proper and consistent manner. It may be, that the so-called rebellion itself might have been put an end to by other means than those for which my brother Stephen has been employed. I allude to the repressive military operations! And I could not think of allowing—I mean, I could not think of joining in any celebration which would make it appear as though they had my approval, and compromise me in any course I may hereafter think it desirable to take."

"Quite right," said My Lady. "Francis must on no account be compromised." She spoke, and so did her son, as though there was a probability of his being obliged, some day, to put the Governor-General of India in the corner for being a naughty boy!

"I think Francis need be under no apprehension," said Sir George, quietly. "I dare say we can manage to do honor to his brother without compromising him."

A merciful Providence gives fellows like Francis Tremlett exceedingly thick skins. She knows that they lay themselves open to cruel snubs, and hardens their vanity round them like plate armor or the scales of the hippopotamus, to ward off the darts of the enemy. The complacency with which young Tremlett took his snubbing, when he got into company that was not afraid of him, was charming in the extreme. Frequently he did not see what was meant, and smiled with the others, as though it were a good joke; but sometimes it dawned upon him, hours afterwards, when he got home, that he had been snubbed; and then he composed a withering reply to deliver next time it happened, and thought what a clever fellow he was to be so ready with his tongue. In the present instance he saw no sarcasm in his father's observation, and took it quite as a tribute to his grave misgivings about the conduct of the Indian Government. Lady Tremlett, as usual, echoed the sentiment last expressed, and was sure they could manage to do honor to dear Stephen without compromising dear Francis.

The philosopher softened under this incense, and explained that he was averse to a public demonstration; not as a brother, but as a Magistrate of the County—(the Lord Chancellor had been goose enough to put him into the Commission of

the Peace). Still, he would be bound to take a leading part in it, and his conduct might be misrepresented when he stood for the county. He thought, that if they were to put up one of the tents that had been used when he came of age, and gave the school children a treat of tea and buns therein, and intimated that there was no objection to the tenants coming, and calling out "huzza," if they liked, they would probably escape being compromised—do all that was necessary for the occasion.

"Necessary!" cried Sir George, bitterly. "Oh, pray understand me that nothing is *necessary*. Nothing that we can do here will add to the honors of a man who has won the Victoria Cross and the friendship of a Lawrence. In trying to do honor to Stephen we honor ourselves,—that's all."

"You see, my dearest Francis, that Stephen is quite a celebrated person now," Lady Tremlett exclaimed. "Dear me, I wonder how many of those creatures he has killed. I wonder if he will look very cruel after it all! But about this *fête*! We must have everything very nice, particularly as it will all be in the papers. Now, what shall we do?"

"I am the worst person in the world to consult in such matters, my dear mother," Francis replied. "The erection of triumphant arches and similar trifling, is, you know, quite out of my line. Consult my father."

"Will you leave it all to me then?" cried Sir George, eagerly.

"By all means!" said his wife. "Of course, my dear George, I always meant to leave it to you. Pray do as you please, and let it be nice. Only do not tease me about details. Stop! there is one thing I must insist upon, and this is, that the printer is more careful over the picture. I will not have a boy with a head like an egg and no features, in the illustration of our receiving Stephen. I cannot bear to see boys without features."

"Do you mind me writing to Mrs. Coleman to ask the girls and Miss Lee to come and help me to make the arrangement?" said Sir George. "Miss Lee has such capital taste. Don't you remember how exquisitely she decorated the church last Christmas? It was all her arranging."

Lady Tremlett rose, and looked her husband full in the face, and a flash of pain seemed to pass over her countenance. It lasted but for an instant, and then she slowly sank back into her reclining posture, and only said, "Very well; do so," in a low voice, and with something like a sigh.

The truth is that Sir George was one of those silly old gentlemen who fancy they will be thought ungallant if they do not begin to flirt with a lady the moment they are introduced to her. In her early married life Lady Tremlett had grave reasons for being offended at this light conduct on the part of her spouse. But all jealous feelings had long ago worn out, with the passion of which jealousy is born. Do you think that any woman who loved her husband would let him feel that he was dependent upon her bounty for his daily bread? No! not if she had taken him from sweeping a crossing, and had all the gold in Australia for her marriage portion.

The letter was written and despatched to Ruxton Court, where it found the family opportunely assembled at the children's dinner. And a goodly assemblage it was! The schoolroom brigade under command of Miss Spicer, the governess, consisted of Jane Coleman (16); Fanny (13); Elizabeth (12); and Bobby, the only boy, a bright-eyed young rascal of seven, who ran the best possible chance of being utterly and irretrievably spoilt by everybody. The drawing-room division, which was in reserve, only lunching, was headed by *Materfamilias* in person, and was composed of her three eldest daughters who were "out," viz.: Laura, Emily Lavinia, and Constance. The age of the first-named young lady was rather a sore subject with portly Mrs. Coleman, whose match-making propensities had been only strengthened by time. Laura was marriageable when Stephen Frankland left for India, and her mother had not yet got her off her hands. Emily was eight years younger than her eldest sister—three intermediate Colemans having died early in life. Constance was the beauty of the family, and was just turned eighteen. I do not exactly know how she made out her claim to this distinction, unless it was that she was the only one of the sisters who had dark hair. Her eyes were not so good as little Fanny's, and her figure not to be compared with Laura's. Her complexion certainly was very beautiful, and this, with good teeth and a haughty air, made her light up pretty well. It was a superstition, however, in Ruxton Court to suppose that she was the *belle* of the county, and was going to marry a Duke as soon as one could be got ready for her. Laura and Emily were, it must be admitted, commonplace girls. They had no colored hair and no colored faces, and eyes of a hue that you could not exactly make out. But their flowing locks were always braided in the

most becoming way ; their countenances composed into the most proper expression ; and their eyes kept under the most modest control. They had nice hands and feet, and graceful figures. They dressed in good taste, had a fair smattering of accomplishments ; knew nothing whatever of the business of life — being taught that it came to an end the moment they had hooked a husband ; were neither “fast” nor “serious ;” were “district visitors,” and looked upon a ball-room as the ante-chamber of paradise ; affected the society of Curates, and believed in Officers. In short, they were just the sort of girls that are as common in society as pebbles on the sea-shore.

The clever ones of the family were decidedly Jane and Bobby ; but if there was a question about the right of Constance to be considered the beauty-daughter, there was none that poor Jane was the ugly duckling. She was not handsome, certainly. Sometimes her mother would sit gazing intently at her whilst occupied with her drawing or embroidery, or what not, and after long and serious contemplation would exclaim, “Dear, dear Jane ! how very plain you are ! What *shall* I do with you ?” Whereupon Jane — who knew very well what was passing in the maternal mind — would smile, and reply gayly, “Please don’t do anything with me, mamma darling ; let me stay at home and be house-keeper when they have all gone.”

It was good to see portly Mrs. Coleman at the children’s dinner, cutting up the big leg of mutton, and ladling out the big pie for those happy, hungry mouths. No Vauxhall style of carving hers, I promise you ; and she stood up and labored away at it with a will, till she was fairly out of breath. Mr. Coleman was permitted to preside at the late dinner ; but he was no one — inferior to Bobby — at the children’s repast.

The first course was just over when Sir George Tremlett’s letter arrived.

“Girls, girls !” exclaimed Mrs. Coleman, her jolly face radiant with delight, “guess who’s come home !”

The girls were generally addressed as an assemblage, and the elder division always replied in chorus, led by Laura. In this way they tried in vain the names of several of their absent acquaintances, till their mother, who was burning to disclose the good news, kept them no longer in suspense, and declared that it was Stevie.

“Not Stephen Frankland !” gasped Laura, turning deadly pale.

“Captain Stephen Frankland, and no other,” was the triumphant reply.

“*The deuce !*” exclaimed Mr. Coleman. “Well I *am* glad ! When did he land ?” “He landed three days ago, and is staying at present with some friends in the South ; Sir George does not say where. He has left India on sick leave for two years, and will be home on Saturday.”

“*The deuce !*” reiterated her husband.

“I alwath wanted to know,” said Bobby, “who is that ‘deuce’ papa talks about so often, and now I know — it’s Captain Stephen Frankland !”

“Hold your tongue, Sir !” cried his mother.

“Coleman,” — (this to her husband : she always called him by his surname, as though he were a boy at school) — “Coleman, if you *will* use such disgraceful language before the children, you must take the consequences. What your father said, Bobby,” she continued, turning to the minor offender, “is an exclamation of surprise. Captain Frankland is a brave officer who has been in a great many battles. He went out to India before you were born.”

“*The deuce !*” exclaimed Bobby, proud of his new “exclamation of surprise.”

“Everybody roared ; and when silence was restored, Mrs. Coleman declared that that child would drive her mad. “How *dare* you, Sir !” she cried, shaking her head at the delinquent, who sat grinning with delight at the ovation his wit had received ; “no pudding for you !” At this dreadful sentence poor Bobby’s exultation fell from him like a pinafore, and he began to blubber ; whereupon his mother, who was his abject slave, relented, and filled his plate with damson pie.

“Well ; but I’ve not told you all yet,” said Mrs. Coleman, when she had helped round ; “Steeve is to have a grand reception at ‘The Towers,’ and Sir George wants me to bring the girls over to help him plan the decorations. There is to be a triumphant arch, and all sorts of things to arrange. Will you go, girls ?”

Chorus — “Yes, yes, yes ! What fun it will be !”

“Will you go this afternoon ?”

Chorus — “Yes, yes, yes ! we are quite ready.”

Solo (Laura) — “May we have the carriage ?”

Chorus — “Oh yes, dear mamma, may we have the carriage ?”

“You shall have the carriage,” Mrs. Coleman replied ; “but remember, it will only hold four, and I cannot let you go without me. Laura, do *you* want to go ?”

“Yes, please, mamma.”

“Very well. Emily’s cold is no better,

so, she must stop at home. Constance can come; — and Jane, you'll be useful, I dare say. But, love! I'm forgetting, there won't be room for you."

" Why, mamma, you've only counted three. Yourself, Laura, and Con. I — — "

" Hush, my love! I forgot something. Sir George particularly requests the assistance of Miss Lee. So, Grace dear, you must come with us and make the fourth."

This was addressed to a tall, graceful girl, with lovable brown eyes and glorious auburn hair, who sat at the end of the table, and had not spoken a word since Stephen's name was mentioned.

" I tell you what it is," said Bobby, stoutly, " you girls may go in the carriage — carriages are only fit for girls! I shall ride."

" I don't know, Sir," said Mrs. Coleman, severally, " that I shall let you go at all."

" The d — —," Bobby just stopped himself in time.

" Now, what were you going to say, you bad, wicked boy?"

" Please, Mar, it was only an axthclam-
ation of thurprise; but I didn't thay it.
I bit the end off just as it was coming out.
Mayn't I ride Spot?"

Ride Spot, his pony! of course he might. He might have jumped on his mother's back and ridden her over to " The Towers," if he had set his heart upon such a conveyance!

The Coleman girls, selected as decorators, left the room in high spirits. When people lead quiet country lives it is wonderful what a brightening effect the smallest unforeseen event will have. They danced along the passage, and, " Oh, come along and make haste, you dear slow old Grace!" they cried, twining their arms round the waist of the silent girl with the auburn hair, and trying to gallop with her through the hall. They all ran up-stairs together to get dressed, and Grace, who was ready the first, went into Jane's room and said, in her quiet way, " Get on your hat, dear, I am not going!"

" Not going! Oh, but you must go. Sir George particularly asked you."

" That is one reason why I decline to join the party. What is Sir George to me, that I should wait upon him because he particularly asks me?"

" But mamma will be vexed."

" No, Fanny, she won't," said Grace, with a queer little smile.

" You darling!" Jane exclaimed, " you're giving up your place to please me."

" I'm giving up my place to please myself. Why should I go pricking my fin-

gers with holly, and making my dress in a mess, building triumphant arches for a man whom I never saw, and whom I rather dislike, from what I have heard of him?"

" Oh, Grace, what have you heard against Captain Frankland?"

" Simply this. That having been away for I don't know how many years in India, the first thing he does on his return is to go and visit some friends instead of coming home to his father! Ah, Janey," she added, in a saddened voice, " if my father were alive, do you think that all the friends in the world would keep me from him for a moment after such an absence? But it is just like a Tremlett! Heaven help us! We're going to be plagued with two of them now instead of one."

" But, Grace, the Captain is not a Tremlett."

" He is half one, just as his precious brother is half a Frankland. I dare say there's not a pin to choose between them."

" Oh no, dear; Laura says — — "

" Well, never mind what Laura says. It's no use talking to me about it. I am sure that I shall hate this soldier, Janey, and I won't go — there!"

It was not often that Grace Lee refused to do what she was asked, but when she did, there was no moving her. So Jane took her place in the carriage, which was soon at the door; and to tell truth, good Mrs. Coleman was not sorry for the change. She was a little jealous of Grace. If she had known that the frightened little orphan child, whom she had consented four years ago to adopt and educate with her own girls, was going to turn out so much more beautiful and clever than the best of them, I do not think that Grace would ever have entered the doors of Ruxton Court. It was hard upon a mother, with three marriageable daughters in *ease*, and as many in *posse*, to have a ward who outshone them in every respect.

" But, darling Grace," said Laura, as she settled herself and her flounces in the front seat of the carriage, " what are you going to do whilst we are away?"

" I shall go down to the village and see how Mrs. Kedger is," replied Grace.

" Oh, that horrid old creature! How can you go near her? I believe she is a witch."

" So do I, dear," replied Grace, demurely, " and that is the reason I like her so much. If I can only persuade her to lend me her broomstick, I will fly after you, and build your triumphant arch out of a cabbage-stalk. That will be capital fun. Won't it, Doggie?"

The last observation was addressed to an apparition which burst out of the stable-yard, and jumped upon Miss Lee, with several yelps of delight; and as she stooped to caress it, the carriage full of laughing girls drove off, accompanied by Bobby, mounted upon a shaggy Shetland pony, as outrider.

The faithful historian is bound to admit, that Doggie was a dreadful cur. His body was too long, his legs were too short, and he carried his tail in a dejected and apologetic manner. His eyes were much too small for his head, and his coat gave you the idea that he had casually swallowed a well-used scrubbing-brush, which had taken root and sprouted through the skin. He was moreover a contemptible coward. I doubt if he dared look a good-sized bluebottle in the face; and as for a gun! — if you put a steel-pen up to your shoulder, in sporting fashion, he would run a mile from it.

He was acquired in this wise: The first time Grace Lee had passed through Durmstone, after her arrival at Ruxton Court, she had called with Mrs. Coleman at a cottage, on some charitable errand, and at an adjacent pond saw two boys engaged in the very proper occupation of drowning the blind pup which subsequently was developed into Doggie. She rushed at them, boxed both their ears; and plunging her arm, lace sleeve and all, into the muddy water, rescued the victim; and being made much fun of for her championship of so ill-bred a specimen of dogdom, stuck to him faithfully and reared him as a pet. Gerty Treherne was quite right when she said that this young lady was, "Oh! so queer." Whoever heard of a dog being called "Doggie" as a name? The only redeeming point about the beast was his affection for his mistress; but this was not much to his credit, for it was the easiest thing in the world to love Grace Lee as soon as you knew her, although she was "so queer." See her now, dancing along the meadows, that Doggie may run after her and bark — a very child in heart — full of life, and fun, and kindness! It was all humbug her refusing to go with the girls to Tremlett Towers because she did not want to prick her fingers with holly, and make herself into a mess building the triumphant arch. She would have torn her pretty fingers to the bone to give any one pleasure. In the first place, she saw that Jane was pained at being left out of the party; in the second, people had given her all the credit for decorating the church, and so she wanted the girls to

have the opportunity now of distinguishing themselves; and in the third place, she had promised to visit a drunken old hag, and read the Book of Books to her, and would not disappoint the poor conscience-stricken wretch to be appointed designer-in-chief of triumphant arches to all the heroes in the British Army.

So she spent that summer afternoon with her ugly cur and still more repulsive penitent, whilst the Coleman girls designed festoons of laurel and evergreens for the gay ceremony that was to take place at "the Towers" when Stephen Frankland came home.



CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BRANDRON'S LEGACY.

ON the morning that Stephen Frankland sought Mr. Brandron at "The Wells," and found him not, a farm-bailiff, passing through Westborough wood, missed his dog. He called and whistled; but without effect. He turned back towards where he had last seen the animal, and found him in a state of fierce excitement, trying to force his way into the old sawpit. Concluding that a rat or rabbit was in hiding beneath, and fond of a bit of sport, the man encouraged his terrier; and having knocked aside one of the rotting and moss-grown timbers, knelt down and looked into the hole. It seemed to be about eight feet deep. The bottom was covered with water; and crouched up in one corner was something black, which the bailiff could not at first make out — but the dog barked at it furiously. The bailiff quickly stripped off the rest of the covering, and let daylight into the pit. The black object which crouched in the corner was then disclosed, and the man, thinking that it was some one hiding there for an improper purpose, called to him to come out; but there was no movement or reply. The position of the body was precisely that which a beaten child or disabled person would assume to escape further maltreatment. There it lay, crouched in a corner, the limbs all huddled up together, the head bent, face downwards, and the arm thrown over the top, as though to ward off a blow. A second glance showed the bailiff that the blow had not been avoided. He jumped into the pit and tried to raise the body. It was to him the body of a dead man — the face and hands stone cold, no blood in the lips, and a flut-

ter at the heart so faint and fitful, that his kindly but unskilled touch could detect no sign of life. Leaving the wounded man as he had found him, he sprang out of the pit, rushed to the village, and gave the alarm. A gate was lifted from its hinges, and the mangled, helpless lump of human clay, that once was John Everett Brandron, they laid thereon — rough fellows as they were — with no gentle hands, and carried him slowly to the Inn. The police were sent for, and a surgeon ; the latter had arrived about half an hour when Stephen Frankland came in from his fruitless errand.

This practitioner had served in the army, and was a shrewd, quick-witted man ; and what he had to say when he drew Stephen aside was soon spoken. He looked him full in the face, and asked where he had been all yesterday ? Stephen had not the faintest idea that suspicion had rested upon him, and consequently gave a brief and unstudied account of his movements, which was so obviously truthful, that the surgeon apologized for his abrupt question, and saw at once that Stephen was his natural ally.

"This is no common robber's work," he said ; "and your business and mine is, first of all, to try our best to save the poor gentleman's life, and next to have a magistrate at hand ready to hear anything he may have to say, if he should ever regain consciousness. So, do you take my gig, drive as hard as the mare will carry you to 'The Wells,' and ask any one to direct you to Mr. Grove, the surgeon. See his son — his son, mind, not the old man ; tell him to pack up everything necessary for raising a fracture of the skull, and bring him back here. On your way out, tell one of those useless, gaping idiots in blue coats to go for the nearest Justice of the Peace, and bid the others search about near where the body was found for the weapon that has been used, and foot tracks, before half the village overrun the place and obliterate all traces. Now, pray start at once, without questioning. Question afterwards, when there is nothing else to do."

Stephen was not a man to disobey orders from one who had a right to give them ; and although still half dizzy with astonishment, and burning with anxiety to ask a score of things concerning the finding of the body — for the bare fact that it had been found in the old sawpit was all he knew as yet — he lost not a moment in carrying out Mr. Hillyard's instructions, and returned with young Mr. Grove and

the instruments some half hour sooner than expected. He did not spare the flea-bitten gray, and that thorough-bred screw had carried him along bravely.

Meanwhile, Brandron lay without sense or motion on the bed where they had placed him. His skull was beaten in ; his right arm was broken as by a heavy blow from a club or bludgeon ; he had bled profusely from his wounds, and had now been twenty-four hours without food. The operation of trepanning was performed as it were upon a corpse, and about midnight — restoratives having been administered every half hour — he slowly opened his eyes, and cast a terrified glance at those who stood around. It fell — last of all — on Stephen Frankland, who sat close to the head of the couch ; changed to a vague stare ; rested upon him for awhile ; and then flashed into a look of intelligence and relief ; upon which the heavy eyelids fell for another long hour, when the wounded man stretched forth his sound arm and felt about towards the place where Stephen had been sitting.

The surgeons — who had never both left the room — saw the movement, and divined its motive. "Go to him — softly now !" they whispered to Stephen, who was standing by the window gazing out into the summer night, "he wants you." They had noticed the change of his expression when his eyes fell on the young soldier, and knew that consciousness was now returning. Stephen sprang lightly to the bedside and took Brandron's hand. Instantly his eyes opened, with the old look of confidence upon them ; his grasp tightened on Stephen's strong brown palm, and never released it till soul and clay had parted. Restoratives were again administered, and his lips soon began to move as though he were speaking. Stephen bent down his ear very close, to try and catch the sound ; but the utterance was disjoined and thick. All he could make out was the word "deceived," repeated very often.

Shortly after daybreak the sounds became more articulate, although the words frequently began and ended in a moan. "Deceived !" he murmured again and again — "deceived after twenty years ! We were suckled at the same breast, but thank God no blood of mine moves in your veins. Twenty years ! Did I not tell you how it would end ? Did I not warn you that the truth could not be hid — that it would grow, and grow, and grow, till it burst through the network of lies and fraud, and plotting, in which you thought

to imprison it, and would hunt you like a felon at the last? And it is so! Twenty years! And then the weakest of your dupes — the least trusted of them all — conscience-smitten, gives the clue which brings me here to ask — to demand, justice! I say that justice shall be done — mark me! *shall*. Deny it, obstruct it for another month, and neither your title nor your wealth shall save you from the *hulks*. You will do justice! Will you swear it? Well, I will not be ungenerous and say that you cannot help it now; but I cannot trust you. No, no, no! No trust between us. No! Twenty years, and all the time deceived — deceived. No trust! Never, never any more — never — never!" And then the voice of the sufferer fell, and died away into a low incessant moaning that made Stephen's heart bleed to hear.

Towards morning a great change came over Brandron. Unassisted, he turned half round on the bed towards Stephen, and looked about him with a perfectly calm expression, and said firmly, "Lift me up." They did so slightly, and raised his wounded head with more pillows. "Now some wine?" The surgeons filled a glass with a drug, the powerful odour of which I have learned to associate with death, and gave it to him at his lips. Then again he spoke with increased firmness and said, "I wish to be alone with Captain Frankland. I wish no one to remain within hearing."

Mr. Hillyard whispered a word or two in Stephen's ear, and then left the room, accompanied by the younger surgeon. Stephen then knelt on the floor beside the bed, so that his lips should be on a level with the sufferer's ear, and said —

"Can you hear what I say?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to speak respecting the mur — respecting what has happened to you?"

"Yes; listen."

"One moment. You may not have strength to say what you wish twice over. A magistrate is expected to be here very shortly. Will you wait till he comes?"

"No, no, no; I will see no magistrate," was the reply.

"Then the ruffian who has assailed you may escape."

"Let him, for her sake, for her dear mother's sake; let him," said Brandron eagerly. "I will have no pursuit, no prosecution, no exposure, for her sake."

"Do you think it right to obstruct the course of justice?"

"Right or wrong, I will do so. I know

that I have little time to spare, and speaking pains me. Pray let this pass. I tell you plainly, Stephen Frankland, that you shall not get one word out of me to compromise that man — not for his sake though. Now, listen. I have met the person whom I expected."

"And have fallen by his hand?"

"I do not say so," replied Brandron quickly. "Mark me well, and remember, through all that follows, I do not say so — I accuse no one. I find I cannot speak to you as I thought I could. Why trouble the mind of a dying man with thoughts of vengeance? Vengeance is not mine."

"But Justice is," said Stephen; "and this fearful crime" —

"Seems to me," Brandron interrupted, "as the work of Providence. I am as a crushed worm, writhing out my last agony; but I think I see the finger of God in this. I could not have done all that should be done. I could not have made, and seen her, happy. Twenty years ago it might have been; but now — No, no! She would mistrust me to the end. Stephen Frankland, you are young and honest; brave and tender-hearted. You will take my place, will you not, and do what I should have done?"

"I will do anything and everything for you; only tell me of whom do you speak?"

"Of the only woman I ever loved, and of her child; but before I say another word, swear to me, as you hope for mercy when you are as I am, that you will not divulge one word of what I say, neither will you let it be known that I have said anything, or use what I do say, directly or indirectly, for any other purpose than that for which it is said. Why do you not reply? Why this hesitation?"

"Because," Stephen replied, "I hope you will think better of this; because — let me be candid with you — I think you are not well enough to be able to consider the full effect of what you do. You may repent of having confided in me. Wait a few days, until you are calmer and stronger, and in the mean time" —

"In a few days, Stephen Frankland, I shall be a dead man," said Brandron, in a solemn tone. "Nay, it's no use shaking your head and trying to smile. Did I not tell you that I had a presentiment of what would happen? And do you think the work has been left incomplete? I am quite calm, quite sensible, now. I see by the lighting up of your honest face that you think this a good sign. You are mistaken; it is the calm which precedes the

storm — the last flare of the lamp before it is extinguished. Let us talk of hours, my boy, not days. In a few hours I shall be delirious; even now I fancy that things which should not move are moving all about me; and that faces that no one on earth can see are watching me from every darkened corner. In a few hours more I shall be silent forever; therefore, hear me whilst you can. I have not been delirious *yet*, Stephen?" — he added quickly, as though a thought had suddenly struck him.

" You have been wandering a little — not much."

" But have I said anything — anything that you could understand?"

" You have been speaking; and I tell you frankly that I paid great attention to your words, disjointed though they were."

Brandron groaned aloud — not with bodily pain.

" Did I mention names?"

" No."

" Thank God! Did I speak of the — of what had happened to me?"

" You did."

" Oh, Frankland, tell me what I said — all — all — as you are a true man."

" I will; your words were often repeated, and your sentences confused. It will be best for me to tell you, not what you said, but what I gathered from it."

" Yes, yes; pray go on."

" I gathered that you had been deceived by some one for twenty years; that there was a secret between you which was in part shared by another; that this person lately divulged the truth, and I conclude that it is the discovery of this that has brought you from India."

" You are right, so far — go on."

" I gather also," Stephen continued, " that you met this man who had deceived you, here, in Westborough. That he is a person of rank and position, and your foster-brother."

A deadly pallor spread over Brandron's face, and again he moaned aloud.

" And finally, that the act of justice which you have undertaken to perform was intended to redress an injury which this man has done to one whom you loved long ago."

" Did others hear all this?"

" I cannot say. Mr. Hillyard and his young assistant were within earshot the whole time you were speaking, and the landlady a part; but I do not think that they paid much attention to what you said, treating it as mere wandering talk. They

had not the cause for listening that I had."

" You are sure that I mentioned no names?"

" Quite sure."

" And you have told me all that I have divulged and you suspect?"

" I suspect — in short, I am convinced — that the man who met you here by appointment is the villain who has tried to murder you. I know nothing further. I would to Heaven I did! It is monstrous that such a crime should go unpunished. Your forbearance towards him is wonderful; but, mark my words, the police are on his track, and he will be discovered sooner or later."

" If they ever discover him — and I pray God, Stephen Frankland, they never may," said Brandron solemnly — " remember what I said just now. I make no accusation against him. If you will obey my last request, you will not attempt to find out who and what he is; but, mark me, not one word shall pass my lips until you have sworn — no, I will not ask you to swear — until you have promised as a gentleman, a soldier, and a friend, to use the knowledge you have already gained, and that which I shall impart presently, for no other purpose than the one — to carry out one act of justice."

" Let me tell you one thing more," said Stephen, " before you proceed any further. By sealing my lips, you by no means prevent detection by others. In inquiring for you, on my return from Kerden, I made it known that you had met some one — indeed, you were seen to leave this house with him. He spoke to some boys in the village, and they will be able to describe and identify him." Stephen expected that this news would have a great effect upon Brandron, and he communicated it slowly, and with caution. Brandron only smiled.

" I am quite content," he said, " to take your promise of secrecy, and leave all else to Providence. But this I do authorize," he continued after a pause, a flash of anger lighting up his eyes, " if — if this man of whom we have been speaking refuse to do justice, or delays it, let my blood be upon his head — let the dog swing — let the gallows have its own! But no shame, no exposure, upon her; no punishment upon him, if he will do justice. Promise me that, promise" — But the excitement caused by the revival of old memories, and the exertion of speaking, proved too much for the wounded man, and he sank back upon the pillow, and soon began to moan and wander as before.

"Yes," he murmured, "you will do justice at last. Why did you ever delay it? I told you that the secret never could be hid. Twenty years! Poor child! poor little child! You told me she was dead, and that was true. What? You will do it to keep the old blood pure and unstained! Is a felon's blood pure and unstained? Away with such cursed pride! Here, down in that wood, we can talk unobserved. Come, follow me. Dead! yes, dead years ago—but justice. Ah! cruel, treacherous to the end! Where is Frankland—where, where? Do not leave me again; I am very weak—very, very weak; and my brain's on fire. Give me more of that drink?"

"I do not know that I may," said Stephen, bending over him. "Let me call Hillyard?"

"No, no! I pray you do not leave me! Give me the drink!" he added, almost fiercely; "what does it matter if it does make life burn away the quicker? It gives me—strength, to—speak, and speak I must, and will."

The two surgeons entered the room as he spoke, and a meaning look passed between them as they saw the change that had come over his expression.

"Oh, yes," said Hillyard, in reply to Stephen's question, "you may give him anything and everything he fancies, *now*. Mr. Somers, the magistrate, has come, and also the chief constable of the county. Will he see them?"

The words were spoken almost in a whisper, but Brandron heard them, and replied for himself. "I will see no one," he said, slowly and with much firmness. "I thank you all for what you have done for me, but I wish to be left alone with Captain Frankland—quite alone. Please to give me some more of that drink, which strengthens me, and then leave me with my friend?"

They did as he desired, and quitted the room.

"Are they gone—all gone?" he asked. Stephen assured him that they had.

"And yet," Brandron continued, gazing fixedly towards the foot of the bed, "I see her sitting there as plainly as on that fatal night, with her dear eyes full of tears, and her bonnie young cheeks all ploughed and sunken with sorrow. You need not tell me it is a delusion. I *know* it is—and more, a warning. Yes, justice shall be done. You will take—But, stop; this must be done in proper form. Please call in Mr. Hillyard once more. Do not leave me—call."

Stephen called, and in a moment a quick step was heard on the stair, and the surgeon in the room, eagerly inquiring what had happened.

"I only want you to witness what I say. I believe that the law allows a dying man to make a gift without going through the formality of a deed or will. I am a dying man, Mr. Hillyard."

The surgeon made no reply, but turned his face aside.

"I therefore call you to witness that I give Captain Frankland my desk, and all that it contains, together with any papers of mine that may be found here. Also, I give him all the property belonging to me now on its way from India. Let my desk and papers be brought up to me now, that I may formally hand over the bills of lading relating to those goods. There is nothing of any value," he added, as Hillyard left the room; "but I will have no strangers prying into my affairs."

The desk and papers, which Stephen had sealed up, were brought, and formally given to him by Brandron. He then bade them bring his pocket-book, which he said would be found in the breast-pocket of the coat he had worn. They searched, but could not find it; and in a few minutes he seemed to have forgotten his request, and again begged to be left alone with Frankland.

"Is it evening yet?" he asked, when the door had closed upon the surgeon. "It is very dark!"

A glorious summer sun, shining in a blue, cloudless sky, was streaming upon the darkened window, upon the honeysuckle that clustered round it, upon the birds that were singing in the golden laburnum, and the flowers that were opening in the garden below—streaming upon the ripening harvest, upon meadow, stream, and fen, striking the teeming earth as it were with a magic wand, and bidding her increase come forth and flourish—streaming upon cattle standing knee-deep in babbling brooks; flickering through thickets, and marking the trees with checkered light and shade, varying ceaselessly, as the boughs waved slowly in the lazy summer breeze—blazing upon weary travellers painfully plodding along the dusty road; upon sturdy vagrants fast asleep, stretched at full length, face downwards, upon its grassy margin; upon timid little leverets, that stole out of their nest in the tangled hedgerow to bask in its enlivening rays. It shone upon snakes and creeping things that writhed out of darksome places to greet it; upon man in his strength, and woman in her beauty; and upon a thou-

sand insect forms, beautiful and loathsome, that had no life in the morning, and would be dead before the eve. Stephen Frankland gently released his hand from Brandon's grasp, and having partly unclosed the shutter which darkened the chamber of death, the sunlight surged in like a wave, and filled it.

"Do not leave me again!" Brandon said when he had resumed his seat; "I cannot bear being left here helpless and alone, amongst all these strange people. As long as I hold your hand I know that you are not one of them, but when I loose it I seem to be sinking back into an ocean full of horrors. Why is it so very dark?"

"I am afraid the light has dazzled you; shall I draw the curtain?"

"I think not. There is something white over there; is that the light?"

"Oh yes. Is it too bright for you?"

"No, not too bright; only it flows over her like a veil, and hides her features. I am not afraid that he will come whilst she sits there, Frankland; but promise me, that if I should begin to say things that you cannot understand — not to you, I mean to some one else — you will clear the room, and let no one hear."

Stephen gave the required pledge, to quiet, as he hoped, the wounded man in his approaching delirium. He did not know then of that marvellous duality of the human mind which creates in it two thoughts — the one rational, and the other irrational — upon the same subject. Brandon's insane thought was, that a female figure was seated at the foot of his bed, and that other phantoms might appear, when she departed, to whom he would say something; and his sane thought was, that this something, whatever it might be, should not be overheard by the surgeons, the landlady, and other *real* persons, whom he knew would probably be in the chamber from time to time.

Through all he said his manner was perfectly calm and collected until the very last, and he seemed to be aware that his delusions were delusions, and by an effort of will restrained himself in a great measure from giving way to them.

"Tell me," he said, "what we were speaking of before I sent for my desk and papers?"

"You were asking me," Stephen replied, "to promise that I would compel the performance of some act of justice, when you are — in case you become unable to do so yourself; and I was urging" —

"Yes, I know. You want me to give information as to who struck me down in

the wood, and you have had your answer. I can remember that. Did you notice the look she gave me when I asked the doctor if I was not dying? But I forgot. You see only the light as it streams through the window; you do not see her sitting in the midst of it, waiting for me with that dear, sad, patient smile. Was it not enough for him that she should be happy — that she should lead the life that to her was the pleasantest and best? Why should he step in with his cursed pride — his vain ambition, and blight her in her prime? Oh, Frankland, Frankland, for God's sake, help me to keep my mind upon the one point! Stop me when I begin to wander thus. Can it be that it is too late? Everything seems so dark, and the events of yesterday and those of twenty years ago are tangled up together so, that I am lost amongst them."

"Will not these letters help to disclose what you wish me to know?" Stephen inquired. "I found them scattered over the table in your sitting-room, and sealed them up thus."

"That was good — that was kind; I see you will act faithfully, and she — Look, look, how she is smiling upon you!"

"You are mistaken; no one is there," said Stephen; "think only of the letters" — and he opened the packet and spread out its contents on the coverlet as well as he could, with one hand; "try and fix your attention on these. Am I to read them?"

"Yes; but not now. Precious moments are wasting fast. Put them away, and read them all hereafter."

Stephen Frankland quickly gathered them together, and thrust them into the desk; but, as he did so, could not help remarking that one was folded in a very rough and peculiar manner, and that the broken seal bore an impression of the top of a thimble. Had the stately head-butler from Tremlett Towers been present, he would have recognized in that epistle a very near relation of the one which had arrived for his master on the day when he left home "on business."

"Relying on my own powers," Brandon continued, "and in a moment of foolish confidence, I trusted him — you know of whom I speak — and destroyed many papers, which are unimportant for my own guidance, but which would be valuable for yours. One that would have told you all, I burnt the moment before I saw him approaching the Inn. No, no," he cried suddenly, turning a quick glance towards the light, "not that — oh, no!

That is safe with the others in the packet! Safe? Oh, Heavens! Is this real? or a delusion? I could not have told him where it was, and yet his manner was so plausible, and he so solemnly vowed to do what I should direct, that I —. Oh, God, help us, if I have told him where that packet is to be found!"

"If you will tell me where it is," said Stephen, "I will take care that no improper use is made of it. If you will tell me the name of the person who is interested in obtaining it, I will do my best to get it from him, act upon its contents as you may desire, or destroy it unread."

Frankland's anxiety and suspense were now becoming almost unbearable. For hours a secret, which he knew must be a terrible one, had been trembling upon the lips of his friend, and was still unrevealed. The shadow of death was falling rapidly upon him, darkening his intellect, and threatening to put the seal of the grave upon the revelation which he was struggling in vain to make. His voice had been very weak, and his words — which followed each other slowly — were pronounced with an effort that became greater and more painful as he proceeded. The change too which Mr. Hillyard had noticed in his features, had deepened, and was plain enough now to the unskilled but sorrowing eyes of Stephen Frankland. Again and again did he repeat his questions respecting the important packet. Brandron heeded him not, but addressed himself exclusively to the figure which he supposed to be seated in the sunlight, praying her to forgive him for some neglect that he had been guilty of, and imploring her to watch over the papers, as *he* — the unknown author of her wrongs — would not dare to lay a hand upon them if she were by. The shock of the *real* impression that he had revealed their hiding-place, so suddenly brought upon his mind, had over-balanced his weakened and failing faculties, and made it wander more than ever. His head fell back heavily upon his pillow, his eyes closed, and he babbled vaguely about this hidden packet. "Come, come," he murmured, "follow me quickly, lest he get there first. Now, then — no, not there, woman! Not in the cabinet; it is opened every day, and some one might find them. We must get them away out of this cursed house altogether; but you are watched, and so am I, and we must find a place of safety for them till we are free. See! thrust them in here, for the present at any rate, till we can find a better place."

Stephen saw in a moment what this meant. Brandron had begun by imagining that he was seeking the concealed papers; but by a very natural process his memory flashed back to the moment in which he had hidden them. Stephen resolved to fix it there.

"Tell me," he said, "who it is who holds the packet, and was about to place it in the cabinet when you prevented her?"

"Sarah Alston — no! not Alston; she was married then. Sarah — Sarah," he repeated the name, trying in vain to recollect some other, — "Sarah — Sarah — Alston. Yes, I know. You were faithless after all, and repented after all. Twenty years! until —"

"When you prevented Sarah Alston from placing the papers in the cabinet," Stephen interrupted, seeing that his mind was wandering from the point, "where did you tell her to thrust them?"

"There was a loose board in the wainscoting. We dropped them into a hole behind it; and I fastened it up that night as well as I could when the house was quiet."

"What house?" asked Frankland, quickly.

"The house he took her to when she fled. The house where the child was born."

"Do you mean where the child's father took her?"

"Yes."

"Was he her husband!"

Brandron started from the state of trance in which he had answered the previous questions, and with flashing eyes cried —

"Who dares deny it? Husband! Ay, that he was, in the sight of God, and according to the strictest laws of man. The proofs are there — there, I tell you!"

"Tell me his name, and that of his wife's father, at once," said Frankland, "for I think I can guess —"

"Hush! guess nothing. The papers will tell you all. You must get them. Promise me you will get them?"

"I do. Now tell me exactly where they are?"

"Tap the skirting-board till it sounds hollow, and then take out the panel. They are within reach of your right arm behind."

"And the room in which this panel is — where is that?"

"Over the armory at the end of the corridor that runs along the far side of the hall as you mount the staircase. Not the chamber to the right — the one straight on. You cannot mistake it. It is hung with tapestry to within about four feet of the ground. The wainscoting is dark oak;

so is the cabinet. There is an old-fashioned mirror with a suit of armor on each side of it, facing the window. I see it now! She sat by that window just as she is sitting there, waiting for his return; and I knew — ”

“ You must tell me the name of the house in which this room is, and in what part of England it is to be found? ”

— “ that he would never come back again to brighten your dear eyes,” Brandron continued, not heeding him, and speaking again towards where the sunlight streamed through the casement; “ never, never; but justice shall be done at last.”

“ Not unless the papers are found,” said Stephen, trying to turn his thoughts back into the old channel; “ and if this person to whom you think that you have confided there whereabouts should get possession of them — ”

“ He must not! ” cried Brandron eagerly. “ You must discover and protect them. You must go and get them, but not until — Not now — not for a little while longer.”

“ I will; I promise you on my word, as a soldier and a man, that I will; only tell me where they? I mean where — ? ”

“ Oh, will you not hear? ” the sufferer replied in an impatient tone. “ In the tapestry chamber over the armory, close to the floor — there, there! ” and with a great effort he raised himself into a sitting posture on the bed, and releasing Frankland’s hand, which he had held tightly clasped all the time, pointed into a corner of the room between the fire-place and the door. At this moment a cloud passed over the sun, and the light which had blazed in through the window faded away. Brandron turned his eyes and watched it, with a strange sweet smile upon his lips, as the rays were quenched. Then, as the room gradually darkened, he sank slowly backwards into Stephen’s arms.

“ I see the very spot,” he said, “ and I shall know the room amongst a thousand. Only one word more. The name of the house is — ”

“ MANGERTON CHASE! ”

“ In this county? ”

Brandron’s eyes closed again; his head fell heavily on Stephen’s shoulder just as the last beam of sunlight vanished. “ She has gone,” he murmured; “ let me rest.”

“ In a moment you shall. These papers are hidden behind the panelling in the room over the armory at Mangerton Chase, and Mangerton Chase is — . Where? pray speak. Say what town or

county. How else shall I ever find it? Will any of these letters tell me? ”

He repeated these questions several times, but received no reply. Gently he relaxed his support, and let Brandron sink back upon his pillows.

He had remained thus motionless and speechless, with the smile I have mentioned still upon his lips, and breathing softly, for some ten minutes, when some one knocked at the door. Stephen rose, and having opened it, found the landlady outside with a tray full of good things which she had brought for his dinner.

“ Now, do ‘e, Sir, take something! You’ve had no breakfast, and no supper last night. I’ve roasted a nice chicken, and got some prime cider for you. Now, do ‘e let me lay it out? The look of it will make you hungry.”

Stephen had not thought about being hungry, or, indeed, of anything else than his friend; but the savory odors which steamed up as the good woman raised the cover of her dish reminded him that he had not tasted food for nearly twelve hours. He therefore let his hostess into the room.

“ And how is the poor gentleman, now? ” she asked, as she deposited her tray on the table. “ Sleeping, I do declare! as quietly as a child. Well; that is good! But maybe we might wake him with the clatter of the things. Let me take ‘em down again, Sir; and you have your dinner in the parlor? Mr. Hillyard is coming up, and will watch in your place.”

“ She’s quite right,” said the surgeon in a whisper. “ You will be ill if you do not take some rest and refreshment. Go down, and I will relieve you. This sleep is a very good sign, and I hope it may last for many hours; but I give you my word that I will call you the moment that he begins to wake.”

So Stephen went down, and made short work of the chicken, for he was half famished, as he found as soon as the excitement which had hitherto kept him up abated. Then, his hunger appeased, he felt tired and heavy-eyed, and having thrown himself back on the sofa, in two minutes was fast asleep.

He started awake after having slept, as he supposed, about half an hour, and found that it was night. The next moment he was springing up the stairs that led to Brandron’s room, and was about to enter, when the landlady came out and stopped him.

“ Don’t ‘e go in just now, Sir,” she

said, with her apron to her eyes; "they've not done yet!"

"In Heaven's name! done what?"

"Haven't Master Hillyard told 'e then?" she asked in a tone of surprise.

"No; but do not speak so loud. Is he awake yet?"

"You may speak as loud as you please now; you'd not disturb him," said the woman sorrowfully.

"Good God, he is dead!"

"Ay, Sir, two hours ago; but don't take on like that. He went off in his sleep without a groan, and he lies there now with a smile upon his poor, cold lips."



CHAPTER IX.

DOWN AMONGST THE BACK STREETS.

LITTLE Union Street, Old Kent Road, S., is a locality with which most of my readers will probably be unacquainted. It is a quiet, grimy, low-spirited, little, old-fashioned street, which seems as though it had quite lost itself in a labyrinth of noisy, bustling thoroughfares, and had slunk away into a corner afraid to come out and struggle with the press. In ten minutes you may walk from it into the busiest parts of Southwark, — may bargain for tens of thousands with hop-merchants in the Borough, with tanners at Bermondsey, with wharfingers in Tooley Street, with warehousemen, in every line of business, all around. You may have a fish dinner at Billingsgate, — see a hanging at Horse-monger Lane Jail, — have your head broken by a drunken costermonger in the New Cut, — get it plastered up at St. Thomas's Hospital, — meet a friend from Norwood, Paris, Grand Cairo, Timbuctoo (where you will) at the London Bridge Railway Station, — see a melodrama at the Victoria Theatre, — purchase an outfit for Australia, and take your passage to Tasmania, Nova Zembla, or Herne Bay, without going beyond a sixpenny cab fare from Little Union Street. But Little Union Street, instead of assuming a brisk and independent air, and pricking up its ears — so to speak — at the sound of the rattle and hum of mercantile life that surrounded it, as much as to say, "I'm ready for you as soon as ever you like to step my way," suffered itself to be scared by the prevailing activity, and gradually subsided into the dejected state

in which it may now be found. The fact was, it had seen better days. It once was a thoroughfare; for some houses in a street that crossed its end at right angles were burnt down a very long time ago; and the ground got — somehow or other — into Chancery in 1785, and, as a matter of course, remained unbuilt upon (a play-ground and vent for traffic through Little Union Street) until — somehow or other — it got out again, a few years ago, when a huge Brewery, which turned its back contemptuously upon the little street and made it into a *cul de sac*, was erected with inconceivable rapidity upon the vacant land.

There were no shops in Little Union Street when this was done. The houses (fifty-six in all) were dwelling-houses, two stories high, with a railing, which enclosed a little patch of black dirt — once a grass-plot — in front of each; but the tide of trade which swayed down Ruby Row, — the thoroughfare which traversed the end opposite to the Brewery, — oozed round the corner, and caused shops to be built upon the patches of dirt aforesaid, belonging to three houses on the one side, and two upon the other. The pawnbroker in Ruby Row had his private door round in Little Union Street; next to that was Mr. Stubbs, the green-grocer; and next to him Mr. Sykes, the baker. Opposite was a shop which broke out about every three months into a new business. First of all it was opened by a milliner; then by a tobacconist; then, by a widow with two daughters, in the worsted-work and fancy stationery line; then it was "To Let" for a space; and one fine morning, just before our first visit is paid, a boy came out, took down the shutters, and lo! Mr. Cornelius Bruffer, Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons, stood behind an imposing row of gallipots, with a choice stock of tooth-brushes and perfumery, sternly resolved to cup, blister, and bleed, to draw the teeth of all comers, to prepare prescriptions with accuracy, and to give advice upon all the ills that flesh is heir to, gratis, every Tuesday and Friday, from nine o'clock till two! (With his next-door neighbor we are likely to become very well acquainted.) And further on, at the corner, resided old Chincks, the broker, who appeared to drive a lucrative trade by insulting every customer who entered his dirty shop.

The intermediate establishment was the humblest one of all, and the oldest; and to tell truth, the neighborhood was rather ashamed of it. It was kept by one Mrs.

Wantley, who in the days of her youth had been lady's-maid in a nobleman's family, in which she had shown her wisdom by saving money, and her folly by marrying the under-butler. Her husband had not a frugal mind, but highly esteemed frugality in others, — particularly in his wife. He borrowed two hundred pounds, and set up with her as an hotel-keeper. Being of a convivial and easy disposition, he left his business to take care of itself, whilst he smoked his pipe in the bar-parlor; lost all he had in the world; went through the Insolvent Court; had a large family; took to drinking, whilst his wife took lodgers in Little Union Street; got *delirium tremens*, and died, — leaving a silver watch, four masonic orders, a gold-headed cane, an opera-glass, and fourteen shillings and ninepence, to pay sixty pounds worth of debts and provide for his widow and family of two sons and five daughters.

A more patient, hard-working woman, and a kinder mother, than poor Mrs. Wantley, never lived; but she sadly lacked the strength of mind and tact requisite for keeping straight a family with the reckless and jovial Sam Wantley's blood in their veins. Flora, their eldest-born, was far too fine a lady to do anything for her living; and Bob, her brother, got early in life into bad company, and became at the age of sixteen as fully-developed a scamp and irreclaimable a "ne'er-do-well" as ever was known to the police. He has now nearly completed a sentence of two years' imprisonment with hard labor in Maidstone Jail for a burglary, committed with six others, in a jeweller's shop at Dover. Helen, the second girl, was the best of the bunch. She was a good, pretty girl, and earned a guinea a week in the ballet at one of the minor theatres. Next to her, in age and merit, was Charley, a youth of thirteen, who was also a bread winner, holding the high and responsible office of clerk to three briefless barristers in the Temple, at the salary of six-and-sixpence a week, — earned, as far as anybody could see, by opening the door to his master's visitors, when not better engaged in playing marbles with the boys of the next court, sliding down the bannisters, and having things thrown at him for disobedience of orders.

The younger children were mere pockethandkerchiefless brats, whose mission on earth seemed to be to get in the way and have their ears boxed by their eldest sister.

It was hard work to satisfy all these

hungry mouths out of the profits of the little shop, though the net which it spread for custom was a wide one. What was Mrs. Wantley "by trade?" She was a fruit-erer, — for there was a heap of venerable apples for sale in one corner of the window. She was a tobacconist, — for a long-sized box, divided into compartments, and containing rolls of brown vegetable matter variously designated as "Prime Havanas 2d. each," "Pickwicks, seven for 6d.," and "Full-flavored Cubas, 1d.," was placed prominently on the counter. She was a haberdasher, — for she sold tapes and thread. She was a stationer, — for you might buy as much as two quires of paper without quite exhausting her stock. She was a confectioner, — as proved by the possession of four pickle-bottles, more or less full of Bonaparte's ribs, almond rock, bull's eyes, and some to me unknown condiment, made into the semblance of miniature barbers' poles, and apparently composed of pumice-stone painted white and red. She was a commission-agent in the coal line. She kept a "Registry Office for respectable Servants;" a toy-shop for the supply of farthing battledoors and whiptops to the juveniles of Little Union Street. She sold pepper, snuff, and birdseed. She was a retailer of patent black-lead; of shilling Bibles and Prayer-books; of penny balls of string; bottles of ink; boxes of wafers; portraits of the Red Rover, the Black Knight, Timour the Tartar, and other celebrities, as they appeared, armed to the teeth, defying mankind with a limb in all four corners of the paper. It is only in poor, old-fashioned shops like Mrs. Wantley's, and in poor, old-fashioned neighborhoods like Little Union Street, that I see these works of art nowadays, — and there they are sadly fly-blown and dingy, and are, I am afraid, unsalable. Has the youth of the present day lost the taste for gorgeous illustrations which distinguished some of its fathers? Does it cut out the space printed as the petticoat of the Red Rover, paste a bit of blue silk ribbon behind, and dot it all over with little gold spangles at three halfpence a dozen? Does it invest in gorgeous foil for the armor of its favorite knights? Does it sigh for a silver cimeter, valued at the unrealizable sum of sixpence, to place in the doughty hand of the Conqueror of Bajazet? Have you forgotten, oh, reader! the pride with which you exhibited your first work in this style, varnished all over with that pennyworth of gum-arabic the better to display its brilliant coloring? I have not. Where

is that production now? Where are our first baby socks, our school letters, the little presents that we made in our childhood, our first scrap of poetry? They will all turn up, perhaps, some day, when the dear preserver of the relics will not behold in this world the emotions which their discovery produces, — when we shall wish, — oh, how heartily! — many a word unsaid, many an act undone, and mourn for many, *many* a neglect, in presence of those worn and faded evidences of a love which endured to the end.

But I have not told you yet what was the main business carried on by good Mrs. Wantley in her shop in Little Union Street. She was everything I have mentioned, and something more. She was a news-vendor. You might buy six different daily newspapers from her every morning, and read (say) twenty leading articles, for sixpence! You might lay out half-a-crown with her every week in penny periodicals inculcating all degrees of virtue and vice, through the medium of romances numerous enough to stock an old-fashioned circulating library. You might learn from the *British Pump* how the good little boy who always drank water lived to be made Lord Mayor, whilst the naughty little boy who had a proclivity for beer was — as a natural sequence — transported for life; and will be taught in the chaste pages of *Snarler's Miscellany* that the ordinary avocation of an English nobleman is to go about consorting with resurrection-men, abducting milliners' apprentices, poisoning their own fathers, intriguing with their friend's wife (who, by the way, if she should happen to be a peeress, is always, after the custom of her class, deep in the power of her lady's maid), and oppressing in every conceivable manner the "sons of toil," for whose delectation these trustworthy pictures of aristocratic life are drawn. Interesting, brave young gentlemen, who don't exactly know who they are; fascinating, virtuous young ladies in high life, with hard-hearted parents and guardians. Or, *vice versa*, brave young gentlemen in high life, with hard-hearted parents and guardians, and virtuous young ladies who don't exactly know who they are. And where do you keep the aristocratic, but naughty lady, and the noble, but rascally gentleman, of riper years, who are the evil geniuses of the virtuous heroine and the brave hero, respectively. In here? Ah, I see! No; you need not trouble yourselves to tell me what *these* are, I know them so very well. They are the groping old lawyers, money-lenders, herbalists, poisoners, sextons, receivers of stolen goods —

miserers all — who know where the missing deeds, and wills, and marriage-certificates are. And next to them, in there, I see the heavy-handed physical-force ruffians who "do" the abductions, murders, burglaries, and the rest of it. Here, also, are old friends — the faithful, but eccentric, servants of either sex; and there, the deformed boys and workhouse drudges who overhear the secret just in the nick of time. Well, put out the types as you will, fit them together, and there is your New and Original Romance!

Dinner is over, and I draw my chair round by the fireside. My youngest child climbs on my knee, and the old cry, "Please, Pop, a story?" is heard. "What story will you have, my pet?" "Please, Pop, Cinderella." "But I told you Cinderella last night, and the night before, and a great many nights before that; would you not like something new?"

"Will it be just like Cinderella?"

"No; quite different."

"Then, please, Pop, tell me Cinderella again?"

Is not my child a foolish little thing, oh, discerning public! to like the same tale repeated every day?

And now, gentlemen illustrators of these popular works, for your "case." Here are the heroes — you can tell them by their open brows and the fit of their trousers. Here are the heroines, with fair hair and simple drapery. Here is the bad man breathing vice through his moustaches; and here the naughty lady with her evil ways stamped in water-curls on either side of her face. Here is the old miser in his ragged dressing-gown, elf locks and pimply chin; and there the ruffian in laced boots, wide-awake, and a curling nose. Don't try and persuade me that he is the honest peasant. The honest peasant may have laced boots and a wide-awake; but never a curling nose! Down there, in those little holes, are the tables, chairs, couches, clocks, mantel-piece ornaments — all massive, clear and costly, ready to be "composed" into the study of my lord, the boudoir of my lady, or the garret of the old miser, just as regularly as my long-suffering printer will pick out the letters c—o—m—p—o—s—e—d from their various corners, and make them into that word.

"And now, Pop, show me some pictures?" says my little child.

"What pictures, dearie?"

"Please, the beast-book."

"But you saw the beast-book this morning."

"Please, Pop, I want to see it again." "Dear! dear! dear! What dolts these children are! Why cannot they acquire a taste for novelty?"

I think there be grown-up men and women as fond of repetitions as my little prattler, or Mrs. Wantley would not have so many penny prints on hand.

The good woman made a few shillings a week by the sale of this class of literature; but her main profit was not from thence. She had a lodger. Her parlors were let to a Mr. Sampson Lagger, a gentleman of irregular habits and varying appearance. Sometimes he was a slim gentleman, closely buttoned up in a frock coat. Sometimes he was a stout gentleman in an Inverness cape. Sometimes he was a young gentleman, apparently from the country, smoking a cigar. Sometimes he was an old gentleman in spectacles; but always a merry, kind-spoken gentleman, with a great thirst for information upon all sorts of topics. He had a latch-key, had Sampson Lagger, and came in and out without question. Little Helen gave it as her opinion, that he was doing low comedy business at some theatre, and did not always change his dress when he came home at nights; and, truly, Mr. Lagger played many parts, but upon a stage larger than that of Covent Garden or the Britannia. Sometimes he would come in regularly, every evening, at nine, for a fortnight, and then would pack up two shirts and a pair of socks in a clean pocket-handkerchief, and not be seen again for a month.

On the day of Mr. Brandon's death at Westborough, Mr. Lagger returned somewhat earlier than usual, and ordered tea, which was served to him by the fair Flora, in her usual scornful manner. How is it, that people who serve you with eatables and drinkables always regard you with such sovereign contempt? Talk about the arrogant bearing of Empresses, Duchesses, and great heiresses! They are pleasant and condescending in their haughtiest humors, in comparison with bar-maids and the young ladies who hand you your cup of scalding infusion of birch-broom at a railway station refreshment table.

As soon as the defiant Flora Wantley had vacated his apartment, and he had finished his meal, Mr. Sampson Lagger lit his pipe, and began to enter into a conversation with himself — as was his custom when there was anything upon his mind. Not aloud. Oh, no! It was his fashion to speak to himself as though he were some one else; and he had in himself so attentive a listener, that his thoughts made them-

selves known and understood without even a whisper of their meaning.

"You've bin a thinkin' many times, Lagger my boy," he mused, "of re—tiring into private life; and a many times summut has turned up to stop yer. You was a thinkin' of it no later than yesterday — and what happens this afternoon? There's a good murder down in Kent; and there hasn't bin a good murder down there for one, two, three — four assizes." He dived his great hand into his coat pocket and produced an official-looking letter. "And the Authorities re—quest that Mr. Lagger will set off forthwith for Westborough, and co—operate with the county police." He dived into his trousers pocket and produced a printed hand-bill. "And there's a re—ward of £100 for the capture and con—viction of the murderer. Good! Dooty sez — sez dooty, be off to Westborough, Sam Lagger, and co—operate with the county police! That's what dooty sez. Interest sez — sez interest, have nothin' to do with them duffers, my man; but go in for the £100 yourself, and win. Now this ere's a ticklish case down at Westborough, I can see; and one pretty easy to be muddled. Penny-a-liners is handy at muddlin' a ticklish case; and so's crowners; but neither penny-a-liners nor crowners ain't fit to hold a candle for muddlement, to the county po—lice. So if you'll take my advice, Sergeant Lagger, you'll com—bine dooty and interest in this ere business. You'll co—operate with these parties, just sufficiently to keep them a muddlin' *themselves*, and you'd go in quietly for the reward on your own hook. That's what you'd do, Sampson Lagger, and so I tell yer."

"Going out again, Mr. Lagger?" said Mrs. Wantley, as the detective passed through the shop.

"Why, yes mum, I've a little matter to attend to that will take me away for a day or two, if it's quite con—venient to you."

"Lor, Mr. Lagger! Why, you know you go in and out as you please."

"So I do, mum — that's just it," said he, as though struck with the novelty of the idea. "You're right mum, as you usually is. And how's the family, Mrs. W.? Getting on middling, eh?"

"Only middling, thank you Sir."

"Ah, you've had a deal of trouble, you have. What did you say was the name of your boy as is locked up?"

"Bob, Sir," and the poor woman's apron twice was raised to her eyes.

"Well, well! don't cry. His time's pretty nigh up now, isn't it?"

"No, Sir; no. Not for six weeks come Monday."

"And he was took at Dover," said Mr. Lagger, musing. "Now I shouldn't wonder if you'd got some friends down in Kent?"

"Not I, Sir; I never was there in my life."

"Never heard tell of a gentleman named Brandron, I dare say?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Well, it don't matter. I knows a party in the hop line as wants to meet with him, that's all. You aint in the hop line though, are you?"

Mrs. Wantley could not say that she was.

"And you don't know anybody that is — down Westborough way?"

"Where's that, Sir?"

"Do you know Manchester?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And Pen — zance?"

"Can't say I do, Mr. Lagger."

"Well; it's about as far from Manchester as it is from Pen — zance, and you go there by railway; now you know, don't you?"

Mr. Lagger did not pause for a reply, but nodded kindly to the widow, made a violent blow, which ended in a pat on the head, at each of the children (who invariably surrounded everybody who entered the shop, and glared at him with their fingers in their mouths) — rushed out into the street in feigned terror of reprisals, turned the corner, and was lost in the crowd that streamed up and down in Ruby Row. He had not gone far when he nearly ran against a man and a woman who were proceeding towards Little Union Street. The man was dressed in a faded velveteen shooting-jacket, corduroy breeches, and a fur cap, and was half-dragging, half-coaxing, the woman along. Habit made the detective turn and look after them; for there was something in the manner and appearance of the man that instantly attracted him. He watched till he saw them turn the corner by the pawnbroker's, and he had taken half a dozen steps after them when he suddenly checked himself.

"Lagger," he said to himself, "you're an ass. You're gettin' painfully ad-dicted to wool-gathering; you're not bound to keep your eyes in your waistcoat pocket; but when you're arter one game you shouldn't go a worreting arter another; you're a hunting for larks, my man, when there's better game in the stubble; and if you was a pointer-dog instead of a detec-

tive po-liceman, you'd get a warning for it — that's what you'd get!"

Soliced by this reflection he turned his back once more on Little Union Street, and went his way.

In the mean time Jim Riley and his sister had entered Mrs. Wantley's shop, and the former asked for a newspaper of the day before. This was quickly produced and paid for; but still the man remained fumbling with his purchase, staring about him in an embarrassed manner, and was affected all at once with a dry cough. It was meant that he had something to say, and did not exactly know how to begin.



CHAPTER X.

THE INQUEST.

AN inquest was, as a matter of course, held upon the body of John Everett Brandron deceased. The investigation lasted some six hours, and it is quite unnecessary that I should weary the reader with its rambling details. Stephen Frankland was the first witness; and all he knew was soon told. It was no secret that the deceased man had come to Westborough for the purpose of meeting some one with whom he had been acquainted in former years. He had said so himself when he engaged his room. It was clear that he had met that person; and, the presumption being that he had fallen by that person's hand, to find out who that person was, was, of course, the grand object to be attained. The deceased had refused to denounce him in the presence of Mr. Hillyard, and Stephen was able solemnly to swear that no name had been mentioned to him. The dead man had persisted in refusing to give his assassin up to justice. "He certainly began to give me his confidence," said Stephen; "but what he said related to another subject, and I must tell you candidly that I am not at liberty to divulge what he said. This much, however, I can say — all that he told me was spoken by him whilst in a delirious state, and in my judgment would not, if repeated, assist this case. But even if it would, I gave him my word of honor that I would not repeat it, and must decline to do so, whatever may be the consequences."

Upon this five of the jurymen cried out "Hear, hear!"

The next witnesses were the boys who

had directed the stranger to the Rising Sun. They fixed almost precisely the hour at which they had seen the two gentlemen walking together towards the wood; but could not give any definite description of the person who had spoken to them. He was an elderly gentleman; a very kind-spoken gentleman; and dressed just like a gentleman, in dark clothes and a hat. No! he was not like the Coroner, or the foreman of the jury. He was much older-looking than Captain Frankland. Yes—they had seen his face; and one said that he noticed grayish whiskers; whereupon the rest were quite certain that he had no whiskers at all. They would know him again directly if they were to see him. They could not remember whether he had an umbrella, or a stick, or anything, in his hand. He appeared to be a strong, active gentleman. He seemed to be very friendly with Mr. Brandron as they walked along. Mr. Brandron walked along with his hands clasped together behind his back, and with his head bent towards the ground—listening. The other gentleman seemed to be telling him something particular. They did not seem to be quarreling at all. Several of the lads said that they had been playing about the Green till tea-time; and that if any one had shrieked out “murder” in the wood they could have heard it. They did not hear any noise or loud speaking all the time. There was no regular path through the wood; but people sometimes went that way as a short-cut to Harpenden. Would little Jack Todd (who was decidedly the sharpest of these boys) be a good lad—the Coroner asked—and think a bit, and try to remember any person that the strange gentleman was like? “For example,” said the Coroner—as the door opened and an elderly man with grayish whiskers made his appearance, “was he anything like that gentleman?”

Little Jack Todd immediately replied that the stranger was not only *like* that gentleman, but that that gentleman was actually he! The other boys agreed in chorus; and great was the excitement for a few moments, until the gentleman in question calmly took a seat by the Coroner’s side and announced himself as Mr. Sampson Lagger the detective, from London, just arrived with instructions from Scotland Yard.

After this it was clear that the testimony of the boys was not to be relied upon; and they were ordered, with much severity, to leave the room. The boys took no particular notice—as they said

over and over again—of the other gentleman, or, indeed, of Mr. Brandron; but being badgered by the Coroner and jury to find a likeness for the former, they did so, and were fortunate enough to hit upon the very man of all others least likely to be prejudiced by their mistake.

A police constable, who had searched the wood and found what appeared to be the instrument with which the death-blows had been inflicted, was the next witness. He produced a heavy hedge-stake, covered with blood, to which several human hairs, similar in color and length to those of the deceased, adhered. This stake the constable had found concealed in a ditch, at the end of the wood farthest from Westborough church. It was hidden amongst a lot of nettles; and he had discovered it by tracking some footsteps which led to the place from the main pathway.

“And of course,” said Mr. Lagger,—whom the Coroner had asked to put any questions that he deemed important,—“of course you’ve covered those footmarks over, and set a man to watch and see that no one meddles with ‘em till his worship can send me down to dig up a pair on ‘em out of the ground for future use? Don’t you tell me you haven’t thought of doing that,” continued the detective severely, as the man’s manner changed; “because, you know, you’re a constable—you are.”

The poor man (who up to this moment had gained great *kudos* for his discovery of the hedge-stake, and had been described in the reporter’s notes as “that able and intelligent officer,”) was obliged to confess that it had not struck him to do anything of the kind.

“Oh, dear me! dear me!” said the Coroner, to whom the notion was also a novelty, “that was very wrong. Run at once, and do as Mr. Lagger has directed.”

Constable Peter Brown was very sorry, but he was afraid it would be no use. A number of laborers had come running up when he found the stake, and they had quite trodden out all the marks. Leastwise, he had tried to find them again, and could not do so.

Mr. Lagger looked the crestfallen officer up and down, from his head to his boots, and from his boots back again to his head, with an expression of sovereign contempt. “And now,” he said, “shall I tell his worship why them laborers came a-rushin’ up? They came a-rushin’ up because you was so proud of findin’ that there stick, that, instead of keeping yourself to yourself, and seeing what else you could see about,

you shouts out, 'Holoo!' or, 'I've found it!' or, 'Here it is!' or what not, just like an old hen that had laid an egg. *That's* why they came up, and you can't deny it!"

Constable Peter Brown did not attempt to do so; and the reporter for the local paper at once struck the words "able and intelligent" out of his notes, and substituted, "but for the culpable stupidity of this witness, an important clue would doubtless have been obtained." Such is Fame!

The man who had found the body was then examined, and deposed to the state in which he had found it. The clothes of the deceased were only slightly deranged. His watch was in his fob, his purse in his pocket, his ring upon his finger. He had evidently been lifted up from the ground where the marks of blood were, and thrown into the pit—for the water (which was about two inches deep over the bottom) having been bailed out, prints of his shoulder and knee were seen in the clay. This examination, I must observe, was not made till the next morning, before the inquest—which was adjourned after a view of the body—had been re-opened.

The cause of the adjournment was to enable Mr. Lagger to make some inquiries touching Jim Riley, whose presence in the village on the day of the murder had not escaped attention; and also to give Stephen Frankland an opportunity of reconsidering his determination not to allow the Coroner to read the papers which the deceased had confided to his charge.

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed the Coroner—as he lost his handkerchief for the thirty-first time, and his spectacles, which had thrown themselves off his nose and were dancing a reel on the table indicative of mingled triumph and contempt—"dear, dear, dear! if you *will* not obey the law, I really do not know how I am to deal with you."

"I *do*," said Mr. Lagger. "This 'ere deceased might have had reasons of his own for not wishing to let out who it was that assaulted him. The law ain't got nothing to do with such reasons, and it sez—'this 'ere man must be found out.' Good! Well; these papers may help to find him out, or they may not. Leastwise, the law sez, 'let's look at 'em,' and the law must be obeyed. Now, the Captain knows what it is to obey orders, else he wouldn't be a Captain, and what he's a-going to do is this"—

"Certainly not to make their contents public," interrupted Stephen, "until"—

"He's a-going," the detective continued, addressing the Coroner, and not noticing this interruption, "to give your worship his word of honor that he won't destroy none of 'em; *that's* what he's a-going to do. And he's a-going to sleep upon what he said just now, and to dream how very inconvenient it would be if your worship had to commit him for contempt of court, and the law was obliged to take these 'ere papers—as it has a right to do—by force. He don't like to be worried now about 'em; but he'll turn 'em up after the adjournment quite handsome. Bless your hearts, I knows what gentlemen like the Captain'll do. When they're right they never gives in at all, for anybody; and when they're wrong, they gives in at last, and makes the best of it. They're rum customers is gentlemen like the Captain, to Rooshians and wild Injians, and sich like; but, bless your heart, they ain't no match agin the law, and they knows it—that's what *they* knows."

Mr. Lagger had certainly an irresistible way of putting things; and Stephen was very glad of the respite thus afforded him. The detective next took the jury in hand, and, without the slightest consultation with any one of them, told the Coroner what they were going to do. "The jury," he said—addressing that functionary—"are a-going to ask your worship to adjourn this 'ere case till the day after to-morrow, in order that you may give orders to the officer from London—that's me—to co-operate with the county police in making inquiries after this Jim Riley. *That's* what the jury are a-going to do. I haven't spent two-and-twenty years in courts of justice," he added—turning round and gazing triumphantly at the ceiling, "without being able to tell, with half an eye, what twelve respectable men are a-going to do in a case like this."

And Mr. Lagger frowned, and the jury looked wise, and nodded their heads in a manner which indicated it to be their opinion that Mr. Lagger was a person of much discrimination, and not to be misled in his estimate of them or any one else.

So the inquest was adjourned until the next day but one; and Stephen, left alone once more in the little inn, gave orders for the funeral, which was to take place the following afternoon; and, this done, sat brooding over all that had passed at the inquest, and worrying himself, not about the evidence he had given, but about that which he had withheld.

It was not his refusal to produce Brandon's papers which troubled him. A very

slight reflection sufficed to show that there was wisdom in what Mr. Lagger had suggested. The law had discovered the existence of certain old letters, and wanted to see them. Well, the law might take them. They did not relate to the secret. But of those other papers which were hidden at Mangerton Chase (wherever that might be) which *did* relate to it, the law had, as yet, no knowledge; and Stephen considered himself thoroughly justified in declining to volunteer any information respecting them. It was by no means certain they would throw any light upon the subject before the Coroner; and Frankland felt himself bound by the solemn promise he had given to make no use of them, directly or indirectly, for any other purpose than carrying out the *act of justice*. True, he had sworn at the inquest to tell the truth — the *whole truth*; but he easily persuaded himself that this merely obliged him to tell the whole truth relating to the matter immediately in question before the Court. "If the law wants those other papers for its own purposes," Stephen mused, "let the law find them out for itself. I shall not interfere. Poor Brandron gave them to my care. I intend to do my best to find them. It will be time enough to consider what is to be done with them when they are in my hands, and if I never discover them — there is an end of it."

I am giving you now the reasons which, according to Stephen Frankland's own showing, he gave himself for acting as he did. It is no use arguing now whether they were good ones or bad ones. Those who were wise after the event said they were bad ones, and perhaps they were right. Stephen was not the man to palter with an oath; and if you will review his position you will find that it was a very embarrassing one. He desired to obey the law, and yet had determined to keep faith with Brandron! He would gladly have given ten years of his life to see the murderer brought to justice, and yet he felt himself bound to become almost an accessory to his escape! It is all very well to say that he had a duty to perform towards society which should have overridden all other considerations. Society had not saved his life. Society had not watched over him with fatherly tenderness all the long days and nights of his illness. Society had not clung to him upon its death-bed, and, with eager eyes and faltering accents, won from him a pledge to do its bidding. Brandron *had*!

Let him be right, or let him be wrong, in acting as he did, no man can say that

Stephen was actuated by one corrupt motive or a fear of consequences. What he divulged, he divulged because he thought it his duty to make it known; and what he concealed, he concealed because he felt bound in honor to keep it secret. So far as Brandron was concerned his conscience was quite clear; but there was one thing that troubled him sorely. "How came it" — he asked himself in vain — that he felt so anxious to keep his father's name out of the case? Why was it that he felt guilty of deceit for not having stated that he had met Sir George in the lane leading from Mrs. Riley's cottage? All the witnesses except himself had been asked what strangers they had seen about Westborough on the day of the murder. What made him await the replies to such queries so anxiously? He was not supposed to know natives from visitors, and no such question had been put to him. Why did he not volunteer the information for what it was worth, and say, "I met my father here at about half-past five. He had walked over from the Wells, and went home by Poundbridge, as I know; for he wrote a letter to me from thence." Why did he not say this? "Because" — as he argued to himself — "whether my father was here, or at the Land's End, or at the bottom of the Red Sea, on that day, can have no possible bearing upon the question how John Everett Brandron came to his death. How could it?" And yet he was not quite easy in his mind at having made no mention of their meeting. This concealment might look rather awkward, he thought, if the fact came out from some third person, and at one time he had resolved to mention it at the adjourned inquest. But, upon consideration, he thought that the mischief — if mischief there were — was done, and that the less said would be the soonest mended. Besides, after all, what could it matter?

These resolutions were not formed until after Stephen had carefully examined the papers left by his deceased friend. In the desk he found a few receipted bills, the official document granting Mr. J. E. Brandron six months' leave, and some travelling memoranda of no consequence. In the packet which he had sealed up there were eight letters, and two empty envelopes, the enclosures belonging to which were probably amongst the papers which Brandron was engaged in destroying when he saw the stranger approaching the Inn. Seven out of those eight letters were yellow with age, and bore date at various times in the winter of the years 1838 — 9,

and related to his Indian appointment. They appeared to be written by some attorney acting for the person who had obtained this for him, and one gave him notice that a sum of £1200 had been paid into Coutts's Bank to his credit. No name was mentioned — the writer stating, "My client instructs me to say" this; or, "My client begs that you will be so good as to do" that — and so on, throughout. The signature was "P. Williams, 14, Bucklersbury," or "Francis Sawyer, for P. Williams," &c.; and they were addressed to "J. E. Brandron, Esq., 1, Clement's Inn, Strand, London," — all but one, and that to "J. E. B., Post Office, Dover." This was the letter in which the £1200 was mentioned.

The remaining epistle was that which has already been mentioned as rudely folded together and sealed with the impression of a thimble-top. It was directed to Mr. Brandron, of Richmond, Bengal, Indies, in an uneducated and shaky hand. Upon opening it, an enclosure fell out, which subsequently appeared to be the copy of a letter written by Brandron in consequence of the information contained in the communication with which it was folded and preserved.

As these two letters are of great importance, and contain as it were one end of the Tangle in which Stephen Frankland's fortune and happiness were afterwards involved, it will be necessary to give them complete.

There was no date, local or other, to the letter with the thimble seal, and it ran as follows: —

" Mr. Brandron.

" Honored Sir, — You will be surprised to hear from me after all these years. I have bin a minded to write many times and tell you what I have to say, but somehow I couldn't. Honored Sir, I am in great trouble, and nothing has ever gone well with me since I deceived you. You do not know what a wicked woman I have bin. He told me you was as bad, and that you had sworn to keep the secret for £1200, and never to come back to England any more. But I found out that this was false, and oh, Sir, if you will believe me, he is altogether false. All he told you about the child being dead and my destroying the papers is lies. It is alive and well, as I can prove, if you or any other gentleman will help and protect me from him, for I darent, indeed I darent do it by myself. And the papers is just where we hid them at the Chase. He gave me the money for burning them, and I swore to

him that I had put them in the fire; but, Sir, I darent go into the room. It is haunted. She comes there, wringing her hands, every night, and a calling out for him, and what would have happened to a wicked one like me if I was to see her, poor dear! Honored Sir, I do hope you will forgive me; but nothing as gone right with me since I deceived you.

" Sister Lucy, who brought all that shame upon us, is dead, and Mary has turned Katholic, and is living in that Institution which Father Eustace used to belong to. If she new I was writin' I am sure she would send her dooty. Oh, pray, pray, honored Sir, do something for my poor lady's child. And so no more at present from your humble Servant,

" SUSAN."

The copy of a letter enclosed was in Brandron's handwriting. It bore signs of much thought, many words and sentences having been scratched out, and altered; but as it stood, it was short and to the purpose. It was in these terms: —

" (Copy.) June 23rd, 1859.

" Almost immediately after you receive this, I shall be in England. When I tell you that one of your tools has exposed the deceit of which for twenty years I have been the victim, you will know what to expect.

" As soon as I land I shall write again, appointing a place and time for you to see me. Fail not to attend, and prepare to do justice upon your peril.

" JOHN EVERETT BRANDRON."

There was no direction to this.

Stephen read and re-read these letters till his head ached and his eyes swam; and it was midnight before he could fully realize the difficulty of the task before any one who sought to weave those contents into a clue which would lead to the discovery of the more important papers — the papers which contained the secret. These, as we know, were hidden in a certain room at Mangerton Chase. Where was Mangerton Chase? This place once discovered, and the rest would be plain-sailing. So thought Stephen Frankland; and at first he saw no difficulties in his way. From the description of the room, given with such minuteness by Brandron, the house it contained must, he concluded, be one of some consequence. Tapestry hangings, suits of armor, oak wainscoting, oak cabinet, a corridor running along the far side of the hall — all seemed to denote an ancient country mansion. Were there not books of reference in which the seats of the nobility and county families were described? Ste-

phen rode over to the fashionable watering-place on the morning after Brandron's death to try and get a sight of such a book, and he got it; but there was no Mangerton Chase mentioned therein. He called at the office of an estate and house agent, and asked him, in as casual a tone as he could assume, if he knew of such a house thereabouts. The house agent had no knowledge whatever of it. Was it in Kent or Sussex? Who lived there?

Stephen replied that he had only just returned from India, and did not know—that all the direction that had been given to him was that the Chase was in England; but whether East, West, North, or South he could not tell. The person to whom he had looked for further information was dead, and it was of the utmost importance that he should find out the house.

The agent was very civil, and procured a large modern Gazetteer, together with Histories of the surrounding counties and several others, for Stephen to search in. Amongst the latter was a *History of Derbyshire*, but Stephen put that aside with a smile, saying, "Oh! — that's my own county; if Mangerton Chase were there I should have had no occasion to trouble you. It *must* be a great house, and if it were there I should know it well."

For hours he pored over those ponderous volumes, and found that they professed to give account, and often some illustration, of every mansion of any note, splendor, or antiquity, but they contained no such name as Mangerton Chase; nor was there — as proved by the Gazetteer — throughout all England, Scotland, and Wales, any town, village, hamlet, township, rape, hundred, borough, city, river, mountain, forest, or any other geographical expression which was known by the name of Mangerton. He looked in the *Directory*, and found many people so called, but not one of them was represented as living in a "Chase."

It was upon his return from this fruitless expedition that he first read the two letters just mentioned; and his heart sank as he saw what a mere shadow of a clue they afforded.

He saw now, that to find out where was Mangerton Chase he must just discover "Susan," and concerning her he drew the following deductions: The style of her writing and composition, and the fact of her speaking of some one as her "lady," showed that she was a servant. The manner in which she spoke of hiding the papers containing the secret in "the Chase," pointed her out pretty clearly to be the

person of whom Brandron had spoken as Susan Alston. But that was her maiden title, and he had spoken of her as a married woman, professing his inability to remember her husband's name. If there had been any post-mark upon the letter it would have been tolerably easy to have found out, in the parish register of the post town, who Sarah Alston had married some twenty years ago; but the letter was so worn and yellow with age, that Stephen's eyes — which were of the sharpest — could decipher no name upon it whatever. There was a 3, and a J, and something that might have been a V, or part of a W; but nothing legible.

Still, Frankland did not despair. There were not so very many Roman Catholic Institutions in England, and "Susan" might be traced through her sister Mary. True it was that her surname was also left in doubt, but the chances were, that, being in such an Institution, she was a single woman. Besides, there was Father Eustace; he could be found by inquiry amongst his co-religionists, or, at any rate, the Institution with which he had been connected could be ascertained. "There," Stephen mused, "would be Mary. She would direct me to Susan. Susan would tell me where to find Mangerton Chase, and that once discovered, it will be odd if I cannot find an excuse to be alone for ten minutes in the tapestried chamber over the armory that opens from the end of the corridor on the far side of the hall."

The day following the commencement of the inquest the murdered man was buried in Westborough church-yard. He was followed to the grave by Stephen Frankland as chief mourner, and a great number of strangers, whom curiosity had drawn to the spot. Upon his headstone was engraved — by Stephen's orders — these words: —

In Memory
of
John Everett Brandron,
Who was
Barely Murdered in Westborough Wood
On the 26th of July, 1859.

"Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay,
saith the Lord."

Stephen had already written to his father stating what had happened, and that it would be impossible for him to be at home on the day fixed for his return. He had now to make a further postponement, on account of the adjournment of the inquest. This was the more annoying,

because, upon the investigation being resumed, Mr. Lagger was obliged to admit that he could produce no further evidence, and at present did not know what to make of the case. "But what have you discovered respecting this suspicious person named Riley?" asked the Coroner. "That's exactly what I was sure your worship would want to know," said the detective. "As I was a-coming along this morning, I sez to myself, I sez, 'The first thing the Coroner will ask you, Sampson Lagger, is this — Have you, or have you not, discovered anything respecting that suspicious person named Riley?' — that's what the Coroner will say! And the answer you'll have to give, I sez to myself, is plain. You aint — I sez — a born fool; and your superiors as always give you credit for doing your dooty. Therefore you can afford to tell the truth. You must tell his worship — I sez — that for the present Jim Riley's beat you. That you don't know where to find him; but that if the information given to you be cor-rect, this 'ere Jim Riley was a trampin' along towards London, miles and miles away from this, at the very hour when the murder must have been committed! That's what I sez to myself, and what I humbly sez to you is this, Don't think any more about this Jim, for he can prove an *alibi* that the Archbishop of Canterbury himself couldn't get over. No! it aint Jim Riley." "Then who is it?" asked the Coroner, feebly struggling with his spectacles, and looking at Mr. Lagger with his chin.

"Well, Sir," replied the officer, "it will be my dooty to co-operate with the county po-lice, and try and find out. But," he added with a significant smile, "as a coroner's inquest aint bound to sit forever, gentlemen of the jury having something else to do, and as we can take the case before the Justices any day if we find out Mr. Right — considering all this, it seems to me that poor Mr. B. was murdered by some person or persons unknown — that's what it seems to me!"

The hint was taken, and an open verdict recorded.

"I tell you what it is, Stevie," said Cuthbert Lindsay, taking his old friend's arm and leading him out of the room, "I'm not so satisfied with this Mr. Lagger and his off-handed exculpation of Riley. I know you will not let this horrible mystery remain unravelled; and if I can help you in any way, don't hesitate to command me. Confound the villain! If he were only detected I'd hang him myself, if nobody else would."

"And so, Master Jim Riley," mused Mr. Lagger to himself, after his fashion, when the last jurymen had departed, "you left here at nine minutes past six o'clock on the morning of the 29th July, and you did not arrive in London till the afternoon of the 30th. Well, having a gal along with you, you couldn't do it in much less time — *if you walked*. But —" (this reservation Mr. Lagger did not breathe even to himself) he added, however, after a long pause, "In a few hours I shall have my eye upon you, my lad; and, if you *are* wanted, why I shall know where to put my hand upon you — that's what *I* shall know."

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CHAPTER XL

"SEE THE CONQUERING HERO COMES."

If Stephen Frankland had had any idea of the sort of reception which was being prepared for him at Tremlett Towers, I think that he would have still further postponed his return; certainly he would not have left it to be supposed that he acquiesced in the arrangement by writing — as he did in his innocence — to let his father know by what train he might be expected. If there was one thing that he disliked more than another it was being made a fuss about.

As he was rattled along in the express he could not help looking forward to the happy meeting which had been so often in his thoughts, and picturing where, and how, and in what manner it would take place. Frank, he thought, would drive over the dog-cart for him, or perhaps his father would come too; no one would recognize him at the station. They need not pass through the village, he thought; and he would get dear old Frank to drive him round the back way to "The Towers," so that he might run up unperceived to his mother's room, and have a quiet hour or two of home-talk with the three nearest and dearest to him, before he ran the gauntlet through the kindly but embarrassing welcoming which he could not but flatter himself would be in store as soon as his actual return was known upon the estate and throughout the neighborhood. Then he arranged, that towards evening he would go down to the storekeeper's room, and shake hands with Mrs. Cooper the "Juno," and Jones the "Jove," of that domestic Olympus. The next morning he

would walk over to Ruxton Court — with Frank, most likely — and see them all there ; return by Durmstone ; have a chat with old Hoodgate the barber, who used to sell him fishing-tackle and gunpowder in his boyish days ; and wind up the day with a visit to poor paralytic Bill Grant, the ex-head-keeper, at his cottage the north lodge of the park. A railway carriage is a capital place for thinking in, if your thoughts are pleasant ones, because there is nothing to distract them ; but I think that, of all awful places to be shut up in with a sorrow that has come, or the shadow of one that is approaching, a railway carriage is the most awful. When people travelled in the old coaching days, I suppose they made up their minds that it was no use being anxious or impatient ; but now, if personal experience be worth anything, it seems as though the speed at which we travel serves, not to allay, but to increase those feelings, and to make us more and more impatient to get to such and such a place, and know the best or the worst of what is in store for us, in proportion as we are wheeled along faster and faster towards it.

Stephen's reflections, upon the whole, were agreeable ones. He longed to get to his home, yet was somewhat shy of the first plunge into it — just as he might desire to enjoy his shower-bath on some frosty morning, but quaked at the idea of pulling the string. The upshot was, that although the last thirty miles of his journey were performed in little more than half an hour, it seemed to him as though the express were the slowest train he had ever sat in. But when it began to slacken speed at Durmstone he would have given a good deal to have had another fifty miles to travel before he had to face what he was sure would there await him.

He was not surprised to see a quantity of people assembled upon the platform, for he remembered that it was market-day at Derby. Nor was it strange to him that his father should spring forward and open the carriage-door ; but he was astonished when all the company took off their hats and shouted with all their might, as he alighted. An ovation was the last thing that he expected ; and his first notion was that the inmates of the county asylum were there in waiting for some excursion-train that was to take them out into the country for a holiday. He was glad, therefore, when Sir George hurried him through the booking-office to where he saw an open carriage waiting for him. In this was seated Lady Tremlett, very elegantly dressed, and,

springing to her side, he clasped her in his strong arms and kissed her heartily.

"Bless me !" exclaimed My Lady, arranging her rumpled finery, "I am so happy — dearest Stevie ! but you naughty boy, you've been smoking — and, dear me, how very brown you are !"

"And you, dearest mamma, are not one bit changed — as beautiful — more beautiful, than ever."

He had always been proud of his mother's beauty. When a child, he had called her his "pretty mamma," and as a stalwart youth of eighteen had behaved towards her more like her lover than her husband's son. He was more of a man than she of a woman in those happy days ; and her silly, winning little manner, and thorough dependence upon him in the — then — frequent absences of Sir George, had won for him a deep and faithful affection, such as step-mothers but rarely enjoy. The "poor delicate little Frank" of that time — though her own flesh and blood — was not a favorite. His weakness and petulance troubled her ; for, as we have seen, she was of a selfish, indolent nature, and clung with a helplessness, which is sometimes mistaken for affection, to any one who would save her exertion and minister to her wishes.

"Flatterer !" she replied, as the little vexation she had felt at the derangement of her toilet vanished under this incense of her vanity, "you know I have grown quite an old woman."

"I know no such thing. How kind it was of you to come for me ! But where's Frank ?" asked Stephen, looking eagerly around for his half-brother.

"My love," said Lady Tremlett, addressing her husband, who had just come up from fussing over Stephen's luggage, "where's Francis ?"

The radiant smile that had lighted up the poor baronet's face since he had seen his first-born died away at this question.

"Have you not told him ?" he replied in a low tone.

"My dear, I understood that he left the message with you ?"

"So he did. But I thought," he added, in a tone of reproach, "that you might have spared — I mean, that you might have told him yourself."

"Why, George, how can you be so absurd ? He has only just asked me."

"The fact is, Stevie," said his father, after a gulp or two, "that Francis is very sorry, dreadfully grieved, I am sure, not to be able to be here to welcome you. But he has gone — he was obliged to go, I

assure you — compelled — absolutely *compelled*, to attend a meeting of magistrates upon a matter of the greatest importance, about — let me see, about sewers? no, no — not about sewers, about reformatories — er — er — or something or other, I don't know exactly what; but I give you my word it was of the highest importance. Francis has become quite a great man, and has always something of the highest importance on hand."

This, I must explain, was not one of the Baronet's fibs. If people will only be sufficiently dogmatical and disobliging upon the score of being engrossed in matters of the highest importance, they will gain a reputation of being "quite great men;" and this useful receipt was followed with much success by Mr. Francis Tremlett, so much so, that his father — who indeed had endured much of it whilst in course of preparation — believed in him — believed in him generally, but not on this occasion. The extent of which his father had availed himself of My Lady's *carte blanche* for his brother's reception had annoyed him greatly. Moreover, he perceived assembled in the Park certain members of county families whose visits to "The Towers" had lately been few and far between, and who had not honored *his* great *fête* with their presence. Young, hearty fellows, like Lord de Cartarett and his brother, Percy Coryton, and Spencer and Ashton Neville; and hearty old fellows, like General Barker and the Honorable Joe Pilkinton (known as "bumber Pilkinton,") could not stand being put down, and set right, and patronized, by "dear Francis," and his set, any more than could the recalcitrant Jack Cutler. The consequence was, that they kept out of his way, but were early on the scene lest they should lose the opportunity of giving our Stevie a cheer.

So the green-eyed monster was raised in his half-brother's breast, and it was this offensive Saurian who suggested the important magisterial business at Derby, which had not been heard or thought of until Lord de Cartarett was seen galloping into the Park. If "dear Francis" could not prevent his father from doing things on a grand scale, he could at least put a slight upon the affair by absenting himself from it. Stephen could not help feeling a little bit disappointed at his brother's absence, but upon reflection he remembered that he had been obliged to change the day for his return, and concluded that by doing so he had unluckily pitched upon the very time when Frank could not be

there to meet him. It would have been all the same, whatever time and day he had fixed. "Dear old Frank," he said, "I hope he hasn't worried himself about it; we shall have many a long day together now."

As he spoke these words out of his loving heart, the carriage drove off, and he noticed for the first time that there were four horses to it. He saw, also, that many of the persons who had been upon the platform had mounted their nags and were following. An uneasy presentiment that there was something in the wind began to creep over him; and this was increased, when Sir George made him change places and sit by his mother's side, on the front seat, saying, "No, no; you must have the place of honor you know, as you are the hero of the day!" But it was not until they turned the corner of the plantation near "The Towers," and galloped into the park, which looked like a fair — so full was it of marquees and tents, and booths, waving flags, shouting people, and bands playing "See the Conquering Hero comes" — that the full horror of his situation burst upon him. It was well for the designers of these festivities that their conquering hero was in a carriage-and-four. Had he been on foot, or horseback, he would undoubtedly have turned and fled in dismay. As it was, he merely got a little faint and pale, exclaimed, "Oh, father, why have you done this?" but before any reply could be returned, the carriage had drawn up in front of the principal marquee, in the midst of a cheering host of friends, farmers, servants, tenants, and laborers; when Sir George, rising with great pomp, shook his bewildered son vehemently by the hand, as though he had just seen him for the first time, and began what was intended to be a formal speech expressive of welcome and congratulation, which he had composed with much care, and committed to memory; but which broke down after the first sentence, and ended in a sob, and a gulp, and a "God bless you, my boy — God bless you!" This was a signal for more cheering, and when Stephen sprang to the ground, actuated by a rash resolve to get it over, he ran an excellent chance of being thrown down and trampled to death. The confusion which arose was not mended by a cry that a lady had fainted; and, as usual, everybody pressed forward and told everybody else to stand back. The rush to get at the conquering hero was fearful, and his right arm ached with the shakings that it got for days afterwards.

However, Lord de Cartarett and Ashton Neville made a charge, and rescued him from the crowd of striving, cheering laborers and women, who stood around with joy upon their lips and their aprons to their eyes, and carried him bodily into the tent, where the more aristocratic body of his friends and admirers was collected. In speaking of this little escapade afterwards, Mr. Francis Tremlett observed, that they had managed things better when he had to receive the congratulations of his dependants upon the occasion of his coming of age. They had not broken bounds, and behaved in such a rude and boisterous manner to him. He had had them arranged in line, and made to walk past him and bow, one by one. And certainly this ceremony was performed in the most orderly manner. There was no bursting of barriers to get a shake of the hand from Mr. Tremlett!

In the tent, Stephen had to undergo a more decorous, though not less hearty welcoming; the first person to receive him being motherly Mrs. Coleman, who flung her fifteen stone of good-nature into his arms, and cried over him and kissed him, and kissed and cried over him again. But O, what changes ten years had made amongst those who were there assembled to receive him! Pretty girls with whom he had danced and flirted at the county balls before his departure for India, stood handsome, smiling matrons, their flowing skirts clasped by miniature editions of themselves in short flounced frocks or knickerbockers, who, finger on lip, stared with awe at the grave young soldier of whose prowess in the deadly field they had heard such exciting tales. It was pleasant to see the generation of pretty girls which was then and there competent and willing to dance and flirt with young cadets at county balls, but who were in the nursery when Steevie went out, come tripping up to him smiling slyly, and saying, "Oh, Ste — Captain Frankland! don't you know me? I'm Nelly," or "I'm little Chattie," or repeating some other well-known name which would sound as a key-note to one or other of the glad-some old times which memory's nimble fingers were playing on his heart-strings. Pleasant, too, it was to see the eager flush which lighted his countenance as the shifting of the crowd revealed some remembered face approaching, or when a stalwart handsome lad came up and said, "Oh, I see you cannot remember me. I'm poor Charley Fraunpton; but you see I have grown up after all. Have you for-

gotten that day when you taught me to row the punt? Well; I'm at Cambridge now, and they've made me 'bow' in the University Eight!" Then, the handsome matrons whom he had known as pretty girls introduced their husbands to him; and the young married men whom he had known as gay bachelors introduced their wives to him; and the old neighbors who remained introduced him to the new neighbors who had come since he was at home; and although his eye fell here and there upon a black coat or a crape skirt, the ever-varying excitement of the scene was too great to allow of his missing some once familiar forms which he was not to behold again.

The manner in which the marquee and its approaches were decorated certainly did the Coleman girls the greatest credit. Nothing could have been more graceful, or in better taste. Grace Lee was delighted with it; and when people came up, and, mindful of her Christmas work in the church, simpered condescendingly that they were *sure* it must be her doing, she took them up very short, and gave all the praise where it was due.

Grace was able to say very sharp things, in a quiet way, to such as tried to patronize her, and many had thought it expedient to do so when first she came to live at Ruxton Court. Good Mrs. Coleman, who was — certain small jealousies apart — very fond of her, had made a great mistake in not defining her position with sufficient accuracy on the outset. People were left, therefore, to draw their own conclusions respecting Grace, and, of course — she being a pretty and a clever girl — drew them to her detriment. The facts that were known respecting her were as simple as facts can be. She was the orphan ward of an old professional friend of Mr. Coleman's. She had a snug little fortune of £300 of her own. Her guardian, who was also her trustee, had assigned his trusts by will to Mr. Coleman, and died some four years before the date at which I have taken up this history. What could Mr. Coleman do better than to get his wife to take the poor friendless girl to her pleasant Derbyshire home, and finish her education with her own elder girls? But the worthy matron not liking, as she said, the idea of being supposed to take in a lodger, threw out certain mysterious hints, which made people believe that Grace was a distant relative of her husband; and this, coupled with the good-natured girl having undertaken to teach Jane Coleman what she knew, for want of anything else to do.

cup her active mind, raised the supposition that the poor relative had her board and lodging in Ruxton Court in return for services as a governess. Consequently, some foolish persons thought it incumbent upon them to pity and patronize her, and, consequently again, Grace took an early opportunity of showing that she was not to be pitied or patronized; and the proud, and, it must be confessed, rather smart manner in which the high-spirited lassie resented this mode of treatment, made her for awhile by no means popular in the neighborhood. She was an object of terror to feeble-minded young gentlemen and shallow-pated girls of her own years, but became very popular with persons of more mature age and intellect. Mr. Francis Tremlett, in the plenitude of his power, had been good enough to state publicly that he intended to "take her up," as a young woman possessing acquirements congenial to his own; only, somehow or other, he did not succeed in doing so. Grace had not many antipathies, but the heir of Tremlett Towers was one of them, and being "taken up" by anybody was another.

Stephen Frankland had not been long in the marquee before he edged his way towards where the Coleman party had assembled, and hearty were the greetings which were exchanged on both sides. His embarrassment by this time had somewhat abated, and, after the fashion of the eels, who, as we are given to understand, become accustomed to being skinned, he grew a little reconciled to being made a Conquering Hero, and became a little more at his ease.

"But O Steeve," said Laura, after they had been conversing for some ten minutes, "I forgot to introduce you to a very dear friend of ours. Grace, dear, this is Captain Frankland. Captain Frankland, Miss Lee."

Grave Stephen made one of his gravest bows; but Grace frankly extended her hand; and after a little boggling on the part of the Captain, the mystic ceremony of presentation was complete by a juncture of palms.

"What do you think of him, dearie?" asked the three elder girls in chorus, as soon as some other group had obtained possession of the lion of the day; "pray tell us, that's a darling?"

"Well, I think he looks very awkward and stupid," was the reply.

"Oh, Grace! how can you?"

"How can I what?"

"How can you say he is awkward and stupid?"

"I did not say that, dear. I only said he *looked* so; and I am very glad he does."

"You funniest of funny things," said Laura, who was in high spirits. "Why?"

"Because I suppose I must try to like him, as you seem so particularly anxious that I should do so; and he *ought* to look awkward and stupid in the midst of all this fuss about him. That is *why*, dear. And I give you fair warning, that the very moment he begins to look anything else, I shall hate him as I do — well, as I do any conceited upstart."

"Oh, Grace! and he so good and brave."

"All men are brave, or ought to be; and as for his goodness, Laura, I know nothing about that, and never take goodness for granted."

"Why, did he not save that poor wounded soldier from being tortured by the rebels, and carry him on his back amidst a perfect storm of bullets? Is not that goodness, Grace Lee?"

"I dare say there are scores of common soldiers in his regiment who would have done exactly the same thing, if they had had the chance," was the reply.

"I see you are determined not to like him," said Laura, annoyed by her friend's coldness.

"I am determined to try and like him, dear, for your sake, and therefore decline to form any hasty opinion of him, that I may find reason to modify. I will admit, now, that he is good-looking. Come, that's something, isn't it?"

What Laura said in answer was drowned in the commotion which followed a highly important announcement. I have said that the tent was very beautifully decorated by the Coleman girls. It had also powerful attractions — contributed by good Mrs. Cooper, the housekeeper at "The Towers," and her ally, its portly butler — in the shape of sundry wild fowls, jellies, and other delicacies, and long-necked bottles tipped with tin foil, spread upon a long table which extended from end to end. And the announcement in question was a direction to all to sit down and make the best of these good things.

I think that the company ate and drank upon this occasion much as people eat and drink upon others — that young gentlemen made the usual feeble jokes, and that the affair was rather dreary, until the champagne began to pop and sparkle in the glasses, and somewhere else. Of course it would be very wicked to suggest that those elegant and fragile creations, in whose absence the stateliest entertainment

is stale, flat, and unprofitable, would, could, should, or ought to be the least affected by such dreadful things as ardent liquors, even when confined in such aristocratic receptacles as long-necked bottles tipped with tin foil ; and far be it from me to lay myself open to the well-merited punishment which would follow any statement of mine to the contrary. Only, were I given my choice as to the time at which I should join festive gatherings of a prandial character, I should postpone my advent until the champagne had gone round. What a dull affair is a dinner-party up to the second course ! And that first galop after supper, Sir ! Did you find Angelina less agreeable than usual at that period of the evening ? Had "mamma's" good nature departed ? or was Paterfamilias more than properly grumpy, after his and her "slight refreshment ?" These are questions which you are not bound to answer, so pray let me proceed with my story.

At the proper period the ladies left the table, and clustered round the entrance of the tent to hear Stephen's health proposed, and gloat over him whilst going through the agony of returning thanks. In the short interval which preceded this act of cruelty, Mrs. Coleman drew her eldest daughter aside, and said sharply :

"What made you faint, child, just now ?"

"Oh ! mamma, the sun was so very strong, and I was so tired with standing ; and those men frightened me so when they broke the ropes, and rushed at Ste— Captain Frankland."

"Hum—m," said her mother, in reflective mood. "Now, tell me truth, Laura ; did anything pass between you and Steeve before he went to India ?"

"Anything pass, mamma ?"

"Yes, yes—don't pretend that you don't understand what I mean. Did he say anything to you ? Did he make anything like a proposal, or had you reason to think he would propose when he returned ?"

"No, dear mamma," Laura replied somewhat sadly. "We were too good friends for that," she added *naively*.

"Has he ever written to you ?"

"Oh, no."

"Or you to him ?"

"Mamma !"

"Well, I did not say you had, child. Pray don't stare at me in that stupid way ! Come ! we'll go back to the tent, and hear the speeches."

They arrived just as the Honorable Joe Pilkinton had risen, amidst a great thumping of the table, to ask permission to pro-

pose a toast — a ceremony which was hardly necessary, insomuch as he had been requested by Sir George, at an early period of the day, to do so when the right time should come.

The Honorable Joe was an elderly dandy in a wig, and labored under the impression that his huge sky-blue stock and high-collared coat were the height of the fashion. Being a Member of Parliament, he was fond of making speeches, and scorned to come directly to the point of his address. He adopted what I believe is irreverently called the "bow-wow" style of oratory. I mean, that he uttered his words as though he were barking them like a dog. He barked out a short sentence to the right, and bobbed, violently, in that direction. He barked out a short sentence to the left, and bobbed again, that way. He barked out a short sentence straight in front of him, and then bent his body nearly double over the table to emphasize the conclusion ; and at each bob, and at every bend, he paused until some one said "Hear, hear !" The manner in which he trifled with poor Stephen's feelings was cruel in the extreme. He played with him in his speech like a cat with a mouse. He fenced and flirted with the subject in the most provoking manner. Of course, his victim knew what was coming, and a dozen times thought it had come, when the voluble M. P. flew off at a tangent, and talked about something else.

He began by observing that it was very beautiful weather, and that the next best thing to beautiful weather was to see neighbors assembled on an occasion like the present, to do honor to a distinguished relative of a gentleman for whom they had all the highest regard ("Now for it !" quaked poor Stevie). Their humble friends, he (the Hon. Joe) understood (bob), were enjoying themselves in another place — (by which Parliamentary phrase he designated a huge booth, from which sounds of riotry were wafted now and then), — and he was delighted to think — he might say to be *sure* (bob), — that the toast he was about to have the honor of proposing would meet with the cordial approbation of all members of the community. (Bend over the table, and cries of "Hear, hear !") Here Stevie studied intently the pattern of his plate. Some of them had heard, the speaker continued with a bob to the right, that the possessions of Her Majesty in the East Indies (bob to the left) had lately been the scene of a most cruel (bob) and unnatural (bob), he might say *unprecedented*, rebellion (bow over the table and

“Hear, hear!”) And had it not been for the brilliant and enduring services (bob) of a band of men, whom he would not improperly designate as heroes (bob, and “Hear, hear”), he thought he might be justified in saying that it was not impossible but that Her Majesty might have been temporarily deprived of the possessions (bob), to which (bob) he had alluded. But Her Majesty had *not* been deprived of those possessions (bend over the table, and “Hear, hear!”) and the reason why she was not deprived of them, was, that she was served by men, who, as he before observed, were not inferior to the heroes of — of Thermopoli —and — and Waterloo (bob, and lusty cheering). Now, what were they to do — what were gentlemen of the county of Derby to do, when one of these men returned full of honors to his home? Were they to give him the cold shoulder? demanded the Honorable Joe defiantly, amidst cries of “Hear, hear,” and “No, no.” Were they to decline to place upon record their admiration of his conduct? (“No, no.”) Were they to allow him to subside into the private life which he adorned, without paying some public — that is, quasi-public — tribute to his worth? No, they were not! He (the Hon. Joe) knew they were not. He could see that they were *not* — (and the speaker bent double over the table, and gazed eagerly into a *blancmange*.) They had amongst them there that day (Stevie’s chair became uncomfortable) many persons who had been acquainted with the family of his excellent friend and host (cheers), Sir George Tremlett, for years, and they would rejoice with him (the Hon. Joe again) at being permitted to express at his hospitable board (bob and cheering), the pleasure they felt in enjoying the privilege of welcoming back to his country one dear and near to him (Sir George, this time), who had been many years absent from its shores. He meant Captain Stephen Franklin!

At the mention of the long-expected name, the whole company rose, cheered, stamped, waved handkerchiefs, broke wine-glasses, shouted, upset plates of trifles into each other’s laps, and cheered again fit to shake the tent down. The uproar having at last subsided, the Hon. Joe came to the point; briefly sketched Stevie’s Indian career, alluded gracefully to his winning the Victoria Cross, sympathized with him upon his sufferings, proposed his health, and sat down amidst more cheering, and destruction of glasses as before.

The tumult was renewed with increased

force when Stephen rose to return thanks; and what he said was simply this: —

“Please excuse my making a speech. You have filled my heart so full, that I cannot get out the words. As for my services under my dear old chief, no one could help doing his duty under such a leader. I did no more; and hundreds upon hundreds of men deserve your praises better than I do. I thank God for having spared my life. I thank the Queen for awarding me the honor which chance enabled me to gain, and I thank you, with all my soul, for the good wishes you have expressed towards me this day.” And then he sat down, pulled his tawny moustache, thanked his stars that he had got over his troubles at last, and longed — oh, how he longed! — to run away and hide himself.

“Oh, Grace!” said Laura Coleman, “I never was so disappointed in my life. I *did* think he would have made a better speech.”

“Did you, dear?” replied Grace, very quietly.

“And Mr. Pilkinton spoke so beautifully!”

“Beautifully!” said Grace, dryly.

An hour afterwards, as they were walking to their carriage, Mrs. Coleman thus addressed her spouse:

“My love!”

“Well, my dear?”

“I really think that it is your duty, as Lady Tremlett’s trustee, to suggest her doing something handsome for Stevie.”

“My dear,” said her husband, raising his forefinger, “*BUSINESS!*”

“Oh, bother ‘business;’ I’m sure I love him as though he were my own son.”

“I am very fond of Stevie,” said her husband.

“Then why don’t you see him properly provided for?”

“My love!” — and the forefinger rose again — “*Business!*”

“Bah! Do you know, I think he likes our Laura!”

“Nonsense!”

“And I’m quite sure the poor child is in love with him.”

“That may be. She’s a great goose.”

“It’s just like you, to run down your own children, Coleman; and when it’s in your power to — ”

“*Business!*”

“And Rhoda would never miss a hundred or two — ”

“*Business!*”

“And I’m sure she would be only too glad to take the hint if you — ”

“Mrs. Coleman, I have generally to

speak the word once, and once only ; but I have already four times had to say — BUSINESS ! ”

And so the subject dropped.

But as the good lady was retiring to rest that night, she mused upon it, and thought, “ Well, I suppose they will be able to live pretty comfortably upon their pay ; and ladies are made so much of in India. It won’t be much of a match for her, poor thing ; but then, she gets so dreadfully in the way of her younger sisters ! ”

So we can see clearly enough what was passing in her mind.

The meeting between Stephen and his brother was, to all appearance, a cordial one, though Lord de Cartarett had told the former, in his off-hand way, that it was all bosh about “ dear Francis ” being obliged to go away on magisterial business. He had only gone, that nobleman said, to worry the Governor of the House of Correction about some dirty little boys who were going to be whipped for stealing apples. But to this statement honest Stevie paid no heed, and thought rather badly of his old school-fellow for making it.

The hours spent by Sir George Tremlett in preparing for this fête were the happiest he had known for many a day. He dearly loved planning and settling and arranging such things, and fidgeting about with the workmen ; and he chuckled in his sleeve as he thought of “ dearest Francis ” with his charity children and his tea and buns, his one tent, and his pretended fear of being “ compromised ” by an ovation to his soldier-brother ! “ It was perhaps as well, after all,” thought his father, “ that he kept out of the way ; for an ovation there has been, and no mistake about it.”

Lady Tremlett was delighted with all that had been done. She came into the Park to look on occasionally at the building of the triumphant arch ; and “ Dear, dear,” she would say, “ what clever creatures you all are ! But what a mess you’ve got your new frocks in ! Will you ever be able to get it all down again ? ” At last she even began to take quite an interest in what was doing, and actually exerted herself so far as to twine a piece of pink calico a great way up one of the poles of the marquee ! If, however, she was not liberal in her assistance, she was so with her praises and thanks ; and, as I have already said, the poor Baronet was a happy man.

But, alas ! retribution came with the bill ! And this having to pass through the hands of the methodical Mr. Francis, provided, we may be sure, the text for many a discourse upon extravagance, love of dis-

play, gluttony, self-adulation, and all the vices. Nor did Lady Tremlett back up her husband as she might have done, considering that she had given him full authority to do what he thought proper, regardless of expense ; and had commended, in no measured terms, what he had done. You see, a grand *déjeuner* is all very nice whilst it is taking place (especially when others have the anxiety of seeing that all goes well), whilst the band is playing, the flags waving, the friends complimenting, and everything has got to be enjoyed ; you are inclined to be wonderfully liberal then. But when there is nothing left of these grand doings but a bare brown mess upon the greensward, a lot of faded flowers, tarnished spangles, the recollection of (perhaps) a headache and a bundle of “ little accounts,” to which Her Majesty’s likeness in blue has got to be attached — why, then I fancy there is sometimes a good deal of grumbling, and complaints of some one having ordered so much *this*, and not having managed to do without *that*, and that objections which never arose before have to be endured, if they cannot be answered.

Poor Sir George had a sorry time of it when the youthful chancellor of his wife’s exchequer began to settle accounts in his usual methodical manner. This process, however, was not commenced until some weeks after Stephen’s return ; and what took place in the mean time had anything but a softening effect upon its rigors.

Quickly passed the days with Stephen, every one marked by some hearty meeting, or the revival of some pleasant old association. Sir George, too, had a good time of it just then ; for “ dear Francis ” had been made to sing rather smaller than usual since his brother’s return. At first he tried the high hand with Stephen, and instructed that Indian officer concerning the manners and customs of India. He criticized, also, certain military operations in which Stevie had been engaged with such solemnity and correctness as nearly to choke the latter with laughter. “ You will be the death of me, old boy, if you go on like that,” he said ; “ but pray don’t talk so before any one else who knows India, or they’ll set you down as such an awful Griff.”

This being said in the presence of his father and mother, before whom “ dear Francis ” could not bear to be taken down, he essayed a formular which he had used with great success on former occasions.

“ I am not going to suffer myself,” he said, “ to be laughed out of a position. To a casual observer, no doubt, the thing will

appear as you would put it ; but if you will give the matter a little more attention, you will perceive that I am quite correct in what I have advanced."

At this, hearty Stevie laughed again, and offered to bet his brother a "fiver" that none of his dates were right to a fortnight, or his distances to a hundred miles ; whereupon "dear Francis" indulged him with a homily upon the folly of betting, which, however, produced no other effect than to make his brother laugh again, slap him on the back, and declare that they ought to make a parson of him, and he'd be Archbishop of Canterbury in no time.

Whilst this was going on poor Sir George sat quaking with fear, lest his second son should push his obstinacy to offensive lengths ; and My Lady reclined languidly upon her sofa, and backed up the disputants by turns, declaring at one time that "dearest Francis" was so very clever that he could not be mistaken, and observing at another that "dear Stevie" had been in India, and therefore *must* know best.

"Are you as certain of that, old fellow," he would say, when "dear Francis" began to preach upon some of his peculiar doctrines, — "as that Goorzerat is on the Ganges, eh ?" Thus cruelly bringing to light a dreadful blunder that his brother had made in a recent speech at the Mechanics' Institute at Durmstone, — a fearfully penitential institution, of which he was the founder and patron. Even when he was right, Stephen laughed at him ; for, you see, the process by which Mr. Tremlett's supposed intellectual acquirements had become the terror of the neighborhood was gradual. Stephen could only think of him as "dear little delicate Frank," the small brother whom he had carried about on his back, and who had cried for what he wanted ; consequently he treated him accordingly, with much affection, but not a scrap of homage, — to his intense disgust, and the secret satisfaction of everybody else.

So, as I have said, the days passed pleasantly enough with Stephen Frankland at "The Towers," until his conscience began to prick him for neglecting Brandon's dying request. True it was, that, during the four or five hours that he had been detained in London whilst on his way home, he had made numerous inquiries respecting Mangerton Chase, and neither from word of mouth or in books of reference could he gain any information whatever respecting it.

He saw therefore that he would have to

trace it out by steps, the first of which would be to discover Father Eustace. He did not expect to find anything that would help him in the heavy luggage of the deceased which he received notice had now arrived at the Southampton Custom House.

At first Sir George and Lady Tremlett would not hear of his leaving home again so soon ; but the objections of the latter were softened when she heard of certain shawls and ivory ornaments which Stephen had stored in his own *impedimenta*.

Any subject connected with Mr. Brandon appeared to be distasteful to the Baronet (who had never once alluded to the *rencontre* at Westborough), and he soon ceased to offer an opposition which, of course, would raise the topics he evidently desired to avoid.

So Stephen promised not to be away longer than a week at the farthest, and went his way into Babylon the Great, there to do his best towards picking up the clue which was to lead to the discovery of the secret hidden behind the black oak panelling in the room over the armory at Mangerton Chase.



CHAPTER XII.

UNDER HIS NOSE.

WHEN Mr. Sampson Lagger informed himself that in a few hours he should have his eye upon Jim Riley, and that if he was wanted, why, he should know where to put his hand upon him, — that's what he should know, — he little thought that, ten minutes after he had quitted Mrs. Wantley's shop in Little Union Street, that same ex-convict and ostensible knife-grinder had entered it, accompanied by his idiotic sister, who had come with him in his long tramp from Westborough.

When the patient reader last heard of him he had just bought a newspaper, and was shuffling about at the counter, having evidently something on his mind to say and lacking the courage or the wit to speak it out. There he stood, drawing lines with his great grimy forefinger on the cigar-box that we have heard of, and rubbing them out again in an abstracted mood with the sleeve of his coat. At last, in reply to reiterated questions from the shopkeeper if there was anything else that he pleased to want, he replied suddenly, —

"I wants to speak to Missis Wantley."

"Well; that's me."

"Ah!" said Jim, looking at her fixedly, "I thought so."

"And what did you please to want with me?" said the woman, edging a little farther away, — for she did not like the looks of the strange pair who had invaded her premises.

"If you're the Missis Wantley as I'm a seeking for, you've got a son called Bob, leastwise, Robert Wantley?"

At the mention of this name she turned very pale. One hand fell heavily on the counter for support, and the other was pressed to her heart.

"What of him? Is he well? Is he? Oh, tell me, Sir, — do! What of my poor, poor Bob?"

"I suppose you knows where he is?"

"Ah, yes; I do indeed," replied his mother, with a deep sigh.

"Well, up to last Wednesday at noon I was there too," said Riley.

Mrs. Wantley drew still farther off. There seemed to be an objection on either side to give a name to the "*there*." The reader knows it to be Maidstone jail.

"Maybe, then, you are one of those who led my poor lad into crime and misery?" said the widow, flushing up scarlet, and regarding her visitor with an up-braiding look.

"You're wrong. If you please, may the gal sit down? She's fairly wearied out. She's my sister, poor thing, and she's daft."

Mrs. Wantley made no reply, but brought a chair out of the back room, and gave it over the counter to him, for Nancy.

"Thank you kindly," said Jim, "I shouldn't ha' come here if he hadn't sent me; and what I've got to say is just this. He, that's Bob, and two others, they made an attempt to escape one night about, — let me see, two month ago."

"An attempt! Oh dear! oh dear!"

"They made themselves tools, picked the locks of their cells, and climbed out on to the roof of the Governor's house. Two of them got down all right; and Bob, he was the last, would ha' got off all right too, only one of the knots in the pieces of blanket they'd torn up and made a rope on slipped, and Bob, he fell, and hurted hisself very bad."

"My God, he's killed!"

"No, no! Don't e' go on so! Not killed I tell thee, though he had a hard time of it, poor lad. Shall I tell thee all about it?"

"Oh, do, do! But tell me, how is he now? How is my poor boy?"

"Nicely, nicely, I do assure you. You've no call to be afeard o' me. I ain't as bad a one as I look, though I arn't an angel, — that's true. I tell you this though, if I was to fall down dead this moment for telling a lie, I am as innocent as your baby of what they locked me up for along with your son in that jail."

There was something in his manner, more than in his words, that reassured the poor woman, and she asked the pair of tramps into her little back room behind the shop; and having turned out the children to play in the street, eagerly awaited what Riley had to say about the erring Bob.

"You see," he said, "our cells were next to each other, and we was confined solitary. You don't know, no one as has not been confined solitary knows, what it is. The days are all alike, and the nights are all alike; and you see no one's face but the chaplain's, and that only once in a way; and you hear no sound, and have nought to do but to stare at the bare walls, until they seem to eat through your eyes into your brain like to drive you mad. It won't do to tell you or any one else how prisoners confined solitary, as are in the secret, can communicate with each other all over the jail, — leastwise, all along the side of a passage, holding, it may be, fifty cells; but Bob, being next to me in chapel and at exercise, as he was next in cells, give me the office."

"The office! What office?"

"Well, I don't justly know what else to call it. I mean that he told me how the thing was done; and then I found out that he, and the next one to him, and the next farther on, had made up their minds to try and escape, and wanted me to join them."

"And did you? Are you one of the men who got off?"

"Only one of them got right off, and is right off, for aught I know yet," Riley replied. "The other was took. No! I'd only about two weeks more to serve, and I wasn't going to risk being tried agin."

"Will my Bob be tried again?"

"Sartin — next assize, and get another twelvemonth I'll be bound."

Poor Mrs. Wantley's tears burst out, and she rocked herself to and fro in her chair, moaning piteously and beating her hands together at the bad news. When she became a little more composed Riley continued —

"For a good bit I thought they had

made right off, all on 'em, as I could get no answer from either cell, right hand or left hand. But one day the chaplain comes in, and says he, 'No. 37,' (that was my number,) says he, 'No. 36 has met with a severe accident trying to escape, and the surgeon thinks that he will die.' But he ain't dead you know," Jim added quickly, "that was only what the chaplain said; and says he, 'As you're agoing out soon, he wants you to take a message to his mother. Will you take it?' That I will, said I, glad enough to have any one to speak to. So he says, 'Come along with me.' And we went to the Infirmary. There I saw your Bob, and heard that he had fallen forty feet, right on to the flags. He had put out his hip, his right arm was broken in two places, so was some of his ribs, and he was terribly shook and bruised all over."

"My boy — my boy! But what did he say?"

"First of all he asked me my name, and I told him."

"Please tell me?" said Mrs. Wantley, drawing her chair a little closer to where Jim Riley sat.

"My name," he replied after a pause, "is Brooks — Tom Brooks; and says he, 'Jim,' — leastwise, as I said, 'Tom, go to my poor mother,' — and he told me where to go — 'and tell her from me that I've been a thinkin' a good bit of all I've done, and if I die, as they say I may do very soon, I shan't, please God,' — this is just his words — 'I shan't, please God, die the devil's imp I've bin all these years; and if I live, why, I'll be a comfort to her yet.'"

"God bless him! — I knew he'd mend. I knew it!"

"Well; he got mortal bad after that, and they let me be with him a good deal, on an' off; but he said nought else but that what I've told you, many a time over; and at last he took and got round agin slowly, till the morning as I come out he was a sittin' up eating his soup quite perky."

"Heaven be praised! But if I was to go to see him, do you think they would let me in?"

"I think they would," Mr. Brooks replied. "The chaplain, he took to him very kindly, and so did the surgeon; and I think if you was to see them they'd get you let in."

"I'll go directly — I'll go this very night! Here, Flora!"

"Gently, gently!" said Riley, stopping her as she rose and was rushing out of the room. "To-morrow ain't visitors' day,

nor Wednesday neither; and the Governor, he's a rare one for sticking to rules. You go down on Thursday, and you'll have a chance."

The poor widow thanked Mr. Thomas Brooks heartily again and again, and, after some further conversation about her son, asked him where he had come from, and where he was going that day; and upon this Nancy, who had sat silent and motionless all the time, broke in —

"I live at the third cottage opposite the well, a mile and a bit from Westborough."

"At Westborough!" said Mrs. Wantley, recalling the words of Mr. Sampson Lagger. "Ah, yes; I know Westborough! It's down near Penzance!"

Riley (or Brooks, as he chose to call himself there) eyed her intently for a moment, and then replied, "Ay, sure; down by Penzance."

"And have you walked all the way?"

"Every step from Westborough."

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed the widow, "how tired and hungry you must be, and I not to offer you anything! We're just going to tea, and if you and the young woman could stop and take share of what we have got, we shall be so pleased."

By this time all the poor woman's fear and antipathy had vanished, so they all sat down to tea together in the back parlor. But before the repast commenced Helen took poor daft Nancy in hand — changed her wet and muddy boots; combed out her shaggy elf-locks that had not known care since Mrs. Riley died; washed and tended the poor helpless thing; ran together the slits and tears in her tattered dress with nimble needle; made her tidy and comfortable with some little things out of her scanty wardrobe — so that you could hardly recognize the wretched weary drab who dragged herself up-stairs, led by this kind-hearted girl, in the almost nice-looking woman with whom she returned after a brief half hour into the little back parlor. Had not the poor creature's brother brought good news of Bob? And if there be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, shall no delight be expressed on earth, my brothers?

Elegant Miss Flora was the only member of the family that did not do his or her best to make the strangers welcome. "If mother chooses," this lady remarked, "to make up to a lot of idiots and pickpockets out of the street and ask them in to tea, just because they pretend to have come with a message from that disgraceful Bob, I ain't going to demean myself by sitting down

with them!" saying which she tossed her head and flounced out of the apartment.

Refined, however, as was Miss Flora's mind, her appetite was considerable; and when the savory odor of eggs and fried ham — delicacies purchased suddenly as a treat for the visitors — was wafted into Mr. Lagger's room, which his fair attendant invariably occupied, in state, during his absences, she began to soften. First she went down again into the back parlor, under pretence of getting some work which she had forgotten, and left the room tossing her head with lessened severity. Then she reentered, finding that no one entreated her to stay, and intimated that she had condemned Master Augustus — (this was her youngest brother) — to go supperless to bed on account of sundry acts of insubordination committed by that juvenile during the day; but added, that perhaps she could be persuaded to let him off if he begged her pardon. This Augustus — who had gorged until he was utterly unable to swallow another mouthful, and was rapidly subsiding into a comatose state — sleepily declined to do; whereupon his mother whipped him with a severity out of all proportion to the fearful howling which followed the infliction, and carried him off to bed. What, then, could the fair Flora do but take the vacant place, and preside? — "just to mind the children," as she protested, "nothing more," saying which she immediately helped herself to a plateful of the savory dish which had been exciting her gastric juices, and made a very excellent meal.

It was soon time for Helen to start for her theatre — for she was to appear in the first piece — and she departed smiling. It was soon time for the nomadic and predatory young Wantleys to go to bed. Thitherward they were driven, for the most part, howling; and then the wayfarers were left alone with the kindly widow and her eldest daughter.

"Now, Mr. Brooks," said the latter, when she had cleared the table, "I'm sure you would like to smoke your pipe a bit. So you take off your coat, and make yourself comfortable."

Jim was not slow to accede to her request, and was soon puffing away at some excellent tobacco which the omniferous little shop provided; whilst the fair and fragile Flora, whose dislike to the fragrant weed was for a while subdued by curiosity to hear what the — to her — unwelcome visitor might have to say, sat at the window pretending to read the current number of "Crimes and Coronets; or, the Mysteries

of the Peerage." But although the previous number had left the innocent heroine hotly pursued by the wicked nobleman along the sewers under the Westminster Bridge Road, into which she had dug her way with a pair of scissors from that reprehensible Peer's mansion in St. James's, the judicious pursuer was too well versed in such *escapades* to imagine for a moment that any harm would result to injured innocence; and consequently had plenty of attention to give to the conversation which ensued.

"But you don't mean to say," remarked the widow, when Jim had stated that he was bound to Sheffield, "that you're going to drag this poor thing" — indicating Nancy, who had crept to her side, and was gazing wistfully in her motherly face — "all that weary way?"

"What else am I to do?" asked Jim; "I wouldn't if I could help it; for it's most like I shall have to tramp back agin if a gentleman as I met at West — — — at Pen — zance, you know, doesn't find me summut to do."

"Hasn't she got any friends in London who would take care of her whilst you were away?"

"I wish she had."

"And I suppose — hoping I don't intrude in asking — I suppose you can't afford to pay any one for taking care of her?"

"I could," said Jim gravely, puffing away at his pipe; "I could, Mother left a little money behind her — saved up for Nancy, I'll be bound. Leastwise, I shan't touch a penny of it. It comes altogether to nigh upon five pound, and I'd give it all, cheerful, to any one as would give the poor lass board and lodging, and use her well, for — well, say two months; and after that, if I got work, I'd pay so much a week out of my wages to keep her comfortable."

"I'm sure that's very good of you."

"You see," continued Jim, in a reflective tone, "if she was all right in her head she could cook and that for me, and keep a bit of a room neat and clean for us to live in. But, bless you! she can't do nought, and a great rough chap like me ain't no use to her. Look what she was afore your good gal cleaned her up a bit, and look what she looks like now."

"I'm sure my Helen would be very kind. Helen would do anything for anybody who belonged to anybody who was kind to our poor Bob," replied Mrs. Wantley.

"Ay!" said Brooks; "she's one of the right sort, I can see; but it ain't likely

that such as her would mind Nancy. You don't happen to know any one," he continued, after a pause, "who has chilfer of her own, and would feel kindly like to a poor half-witted thing — some one who'd take care on her for a time? Because if you did, I'd give her the money down, and I'd go and look for work with a light heart." And he cast a searching glance at the widow, as though he were reading all that was passing in her mind.

The sum named as a subsidy was not a large one to feed and board a full-grown woman upon, but as things went in that frugal household it was quite sufficient, and a little to spare. Moreover, it had been a bad time lately in the little shop. A fast young gentleman, who lodged higher up in the street and had run up a longish score, ran it off through the Insolvent Court just as the water-rate (for which the expected payment had been intended) became oppressively due. Then there was the intended journey to Maidstone to see the crippled prodigal, and cherish his good resolves with more of the long-enduring motherly tenderness which, like bread cast upon the waters, had come home at last. *That* must be taken, if all the stock had to be sold up to raise the money, — "and it will cost a good bit," thought poor Mrs. Wantley. Be good enough to remember, that these calculations relate to a household to which a few shillings a week, more or less, made all the difference between plenty and want — between the comfort of owing nothing and the misery of debt. Please to think of this, ladies and gentlemen, when you make your bargains and tell Styles's little girl to call again some other day for her mother's little account, as it is too much trouble to get change now. You are at dinner, you are going out for a drive, and are hurried. You are just come in from a walk, and are tired. "Bless the woman!" you exclaim, "why does she tease one so! Let her send again." These may seem small things to moralize upon; but the Parish Unions can tell you of hard-working folk who have ended their days in misery, because they had too often to "call again" at rich men's doors. The jail and the reformatory can tell you of children driven upon the streets to starve when the bread-winner's little shop was sold up, or his tools pawned to satisfy those who would not "call again" on *him*! Fingers that once were decorated with the *insignia* of honest toil, but upon which now glitter Vice's costly fetters, could write the history of patient work-girls, who would be patient work-girls still

if grim Hunger could be told, as *they* have been, to "call again." Ay! and the black whirling river can show you the ghastly forms of those who will never "call again," unless it be for vengeance on those whose selfishness, indolence, or fraud, has brought them to their nameless graves.

It was no use to "call again" on the fast young gentleman, and the rate collector had announced that he would pay his last visit on the next morning but one. The takings of the little shop, with Mr. Lagger's rent and the earnings of Helen and Charley, kept the honest household afloat, despite the extravagances of Miss Flora; but there was no surplus to be drawn upon for a contingency like the present. So good Mrs. Wantley, after some hesitation, declared that she did really think that she knew somebody who would be likely to take good care of poor Nancy. "You see," she said, "she seems very quiet, and won't give much trouble after all."

"Trouble!" exclaimed Jim, who knew well what was coming; "just give her some of them old pictures, or a pair of scissors and a bit of paper to cut about, and she'll sit as quiet as a mouse from morning to night."

"The children would soon get fond of her," mused Mrs. Wantley, "and she of them. And we could easy put her up a bed."

"*You* could?"

"Bless me! what am I talking about? Well, my thought's out now, you see, Mr. Brooks, and if you like to trust me with your sister, *why*, I'll trust *you* to do what's right in return."

Riley sprang to his feet, and smacked his hand in hers. "It's a bargain," he cried joyfully. "By Goles, it was good luck that sent me here this night!"

The compact was not concluded without a protest from the fair Flora, who declared that mother might do what she liked, but *she* wasn't going to be put about by lunatics, and so she told them. She thanked her stars that there was them about as would soon see her settled somewhere else — a hint of impending matrimony which the gentle creature kept for occasions like the present.

The bargain, however, was struck, and the money paid over, Mrs. Wantley insisting upon being allowed to draw up in writing what she supposed to be an inflexibly formal document which would bind her in the severest manner to perform her part of the contract. To her sorrow, she had become acquainted with

the roundabout phraseology of the law, as contained in the various mortgages and assignments made by her jovial but reckless husband; and she made use of her knowledge, good, honest dame, in the following deed:—

“I hereby promise for myself, my heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, to take care of her, and treat her well, and give her as much victuals as she can eat for two months, for this money, according to arrangements now made. And I declare this to be my act and deed, anything herein contained to the contrary notwithstanding.”

But as it did not show who the “I” might be, or who was the “her” who was to be taken care of, or how much “this money” amounted to, or what the “arrangements now made” were; and as, moreover, it bore no signature and no date, it cannot be said to be a satisfactory production in a legal point of view. It answered, however, all the purposes for which it was made, and Jim Riley wrapped it up in a piece of old newspaper and pocketed it with much apparent satisfaction.

It was then resolved that Nancy should stay and begin her sojourn that very night, sleeping with Helen till a bed could be prepared for her—that Jim should be accommodated at a respectable lodging-house known to Mrs. Wantley, in Ruby Row—that he should depart for Sheffield the next morning—and that out of his first wages he should send up money to buy Nancy some clothes, or, failing his obtaining employment, that the little which was requisite should be purchased out of the five pounds and made up afterwards—and, lastly, that Mrs. Wantley should go to Maidstone by the Parliamentary train on the following Friday to see her erring son. Then they began to talk of things in general, and, amongst others, of the gentleman who had promised to help Riley if he went to Sheffield.

“I’ve got other friends down there as is likely to find me something to do,” said Jim, “besides that gentleman. He lives in a great house near Durmstone, and I don’t expect there’s much in my line to be done there.”

“Near Durmstone!” replied Mrs. Wantley, in a tone of surprise; “what is his name?”

“Captain Stephen Frankland.”

“Ah, I’ve heard that name somewhere, but I don’t remember him. But, law! it’s twenty years and more since I was near Durmstone, and I was there only for a few weeks.”

“In the town?”

“No; I was living in service with Lord Penruthyn. It was my second place; I wasn’t married then. Haven’t you ever heard tell of the Honorable Horace Penruthyn?”

“No.”

“He was a wild one! He was My Lord’s younger brother. My Lord was only a young man himself, and rented an old house down there for the fishing and shooting, and what not. Eh! but it was a gloomy place. It nearly give me the horrors to live there; and I was not a bit sorry when the establishment was broke up and the family went abroad.”

“Why was that, if I might make bold to ask?” said Jim.

“Well, it was something to do with Mr. Horace and a wild young friend of his—as wild a one as himself. They was all as poor as mice for all their title, and he—that’s the Honorable Horace—got his brother into some awful scrape with bills, and one thing and another, so that they was obliged to make a fit of it without any warning. I lost my wages, and so did the other servants; but I did not mind that. I was quite satisfied to get clear of that ghastly old house. Don’t talk about it, it makes me creep to think of it.”

So the subject was dropped; and soon afterwards, Helen having returned early, as she was not wanted in the afterpiece, Nancy was again given into her charge, and Mr. Brooks went his way to the lodging-house in Ruby Row, saying that he would return in the morning to wish his sister good-by.

A long account of the inquest upon the murder in Westborough Wood appeared in the next day’s papers; and instead of Jim Riley came a message from him, stating that he had fallen in with a friend who was going into Yorkshire, and with whom he had agreed to travel in company; but as this friend would start as early as daybreak, why, Mr. Brooks would not disturb Mrs. Wantley, but wished her and Nancy good-by, and they should soon hear from him. Nancy never missed him. At first she was restless and querulous in her new home; but Helen and Mrs. Wantley were very good and gentle with the poor creature, and the children kept her constantly amused; so that in a very short time she not only became quite contented with the change, but seemed to brighten up considerably. Her unchanged, eventless life, in the little cottage at Westborough, was almost enough of itself to deaden any intellect that was not of the

strongest. Certainly, it had the worst possible effect upon a mind which had never yet awakened. Little Union Street — not, as we have seen, the gayest of localities — was to her full of wonders, and the humble shop and its customers slowly filled her mind with new but vague ideas, which, confused and distorted as they were, were better than no ideas at all.

In due time Mr. Lagger returned to his lodgings. He sauntered in as though he had just been as far as the door to see whether it was fine or raining, and by some chance stumbled over Nancy on the staircase. This happened upon the day on which Mrs. Wantley had gone to Maidstone. Helen was absent at a rehearsal, Charley was in the Temple, and the elegant Miss Flora, being engaged in a flirtation with Mr. Cornelius Bruffer, the chemist next door, the small Wantleys, left to themselves, were devastating the neighborhood, and getting amongst the horses' hoofs and under the wheels of the vehicles passing down Ruby Row. How comes it that small children of this class *cannot* be run over? If you were to place the infant heir to ten thousand a year alone in Little Union Street, he would be a mangled corpse in as many minutes!

Nancy was, therefore, all alone, and having a vague notion that the person left to "mind the shop" was expected to treat all incomers as so many natural enemies thereto, flew fiercely at the detective, and would have ejected him summarily, to his intense astonishment, if Miss Flora — attracted by the disturbance — had not made her appearance.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Mr. Lagger; "what's all this about?"

"If you please, Sir, it's only a poor lunatic that mother would go and take charge of, to worrit us all. She won't hurt you."

"I won't take my oath of that," replied the lodger, casting a doubtful glance at Nancy's flushed and angry face. "Who the dickens is she?"

Asking this, he gave what Helen would call "a cue," and it was taken immediately, for Nancy replied, eagerly —

"*I live at the third cottage opposite the well, a mile and a bit from Westborough.*"

If Mr. Sampson Lagger had never yet been taken aback during his long professional experience, he was fairly taken aback now. His astonishment vented itself in a long, low whistle.

"Whee — u — u! Westborough, eh! And where's brother Jim?"

Ay, where *was* brother Jim? Nancy could give no information; but Flora told what she knew of his movements — and Mr. Lagger did not sleep that night at home.



CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE TRACK.

STEPHEN FRANKLAND's anticipation that there would be nothing in Brandron's heavy luggage to give a clue to Mangerton Chase was correct. It consisted, for the most part, of articles evidently intended as presents to the gentler sex, and of great value. Cashmere shawls, exquisite Indian muslins, bracelets and other ornaments in gold and silver filigree-work; boxes, ornaments, and puzzles carved in ivory and sandalwood — curiosities of all sorts there were in plenty, and underneath, at the bottom of the box, Stephen found a bundle of shares in a Calcutta Bank which he knew to be worth near upon eight hundred pounds. There was also some wearing apparel; but no letters — no papers or memoranda of any value whatever for carrying out the quondam owner's dying request.

We have seen that Stevie had well considered the manner in which the clue was to be sought for. The key to the secret was in the hands of Father Eustace; and the first step was to find him out and obtain an interview, or to ascertain with what institution likely to afford a home to such a person as Mary Alston he was connected, some time between the years 1838 — when Brandron went to India — and 1859, when he received the letter signed "Susan." But how was Stephen to commence these inquiries — and where? He had thought over this many a time before he left home on his search, and from questions which he had put in a casual manner to the Vicar of Durmstone and Lord de Cartarett — who was a Roman Catholic, but, I am afraid, not a very good one — he learnt that something in the nature of a Clergy List was issued at the office of a notorious Roman Catholic newspaper which was published every week in Strand. To the office of this journal he went direct from the railway station, and obtained permission to look over the current list, and such of the lists for previous years as were on the premises. These went back as far as 1847, and the pub-

lisher was not sure whether there were any others. He rather thought that the publication was commenced then, or thereabouts; but was not quite certain. In none of these was the name of Father Eustace.

Stephen next began to inquire about institutions in which a person in humble life could obtain a home; but obtained very vague replies. Such *public* institutions as existed in London would be mentioned in the Post-Office Directory. The publisher knew nothing about those in the country; perhaps the sub-editor did, only he was out; and the editor never came to the office. The publisher rather thought there was one at Birmingham and one at Salford, and had heard about one at Liverpool. This much, however, he could say, there was no printed guide whatever which would give the inquirer such information as he desired, relative to all England, or to private charities. Was the publisher acquainted with any person who would be likely to know? Well, perhaps the sub-editor might. Would Stephen call again? Stephen promised to do so, and left the shop a little dashed by this failure in a quarter from which he had been led to expect so much.

An interview with the sub-editor was fixed for the next day at two o'clock; and, being so near the Temple, Stephen thought he would call upon Cuddy Lindsay by way of killing time. He found no difficulty in getting *into* this abode of learning; but after having wandered to and fro amongst its courts and passages for about three-quarters of an hour, he perceived it to be by no means so easy for the stranger to get *out* of it, or to find any point therein of which he was in search—particularly if he trusted to the directions of the clerks and porters who infested its precincts.

At last he stumbled upon Sycamore Court, and upon the lentil of No. 7 found painted the name of Mr. Cuthbert Lindsay, with two others, as occupying the third floor. He sprang up the stairs; and when he had mounted about half way, encountered a young gentleman laboriously engaged in zoological investigations. He had caught an unlucky mouse, and, having tied a long piece of black thread securely to its tail, was trying to make it walk up one of the banisters backwards. Of course Stephen boxed his ears. There is a sort of boy to box whose ears in passing is a debt one owes to society, and which society should exact. It may not be quite legal, perhaps; but this is a fault in the law, which will not be wholly just

until it makes boxing the ears of an electric telegraph boy discovered playing marbles, a doctor's boy caught sliding on the pavement, or an office-boy seen playing on the staircase, an assault not only *justifiable*, but compulsory.

The delinquent upon this occasion—who was no other than our friend Charley Wantley—resented the infliction after the manner of his tribe. He stiffened his arms, held them behind him, and, thrusting his chin very close to the bottom of Stephen's waistcoat, requested him to hit him (Charley) again, in a tone which threatened the severest consequences in case the blow were repeated. In the confusion the mouse escaped, and Stephen, pushing its indignant tormentor aside, continued his ascent, and found Cuddy's door open. He was about to enter, when Charley ran up, and, seeing whither the stranger was bound, assumed a penitential mien, and asked whom he pleased to want.

He was about to reply, when strange sounds from within attracted his attention. First came a slight noise, as though of a struggle; and then a voice, which he knew to be Cuddy's, exclaimed,—

“Now, I say, put me down, Jackson, please put me down! Con—found you! Don’t—DON’T! Don’t be a fool! Put me down!”

“Then swear you won’t tell.”

“I’ll see you hanged first! Oh!”

At this moment an inner door was thrown open, and a gentleman in red morocco slippers and a velvet shooting-jacket, who could have commanded a handsome salary as the giant in a travelling show, appeared in the passage, carrying Cuddy in his arms as a nurse would carry an infant, and occasionally tossing him as infants are tossed.

“You great idiot!” screamed Cuddy; “put me down! Don’t you see there’s some one at the door?”

The great idiot did not, for his back was towards it; but thus appealed to, he dropped Cuddy in so summary a manner, that if the little man had not had a good hold on his nurse’s whiskers he might have come to grief.

“I think you used to know this person, Stevie,” said Lindsay, when the first greetings were exchanged. “He was with us at Rugby. He owns to the vulgar name of Jackson. Jackson, Captain Frankland.”

“I am ashamed,” replied Stevie, “to own that I do not remember Mr. Jackson.”

“Oh, I only came just as you were

leaving. I was quite a little fellow when you were a preposter," was Jackson's reply.

"I hope to goodness that I never thrashed you, then!" said Stephen gayly, glancing at the Herculean proportions of the speaker, who thereupon roared out a hearty laugh, and observed, that if Stevie had done so, he probably well deserved all he had got.

There is a sort of freemasonry in these things; and Stephen, who would have been as stiff and cold as Gold-Stick-in-Waiting towards the giant, had he been a stranger, warmed up towards him directly he heard that they had been together for a few weeks at the same public school.

"Your state is the more gracious, I assure you," Cuddy observed, "for not remembering the creature called Jackson. It was indulging its fierce and brutal nature when you came in."

"If you only knew, Captain Frankland, what a desperate little tyrant Cuddy is in these chambers, you would consider him mercifully dealt with. It is the only way we have of bringing him to order."

"Don't say *we*," replied a voice from the inner room; "and either come in or shut the door."

"The person who now speaks," said Cuddy, ushering Stephen into the apartment from whence the voice proceeded, "is another familiar, whom I picked up at Merton. He is a working creature, and has recently put us to open shame by getting briefs. Captain Frankland — Lorimer. Jackson, you may smoke one pipe. Stevie, behold some bitter beer! Lorimer, put away those insulting briefs! And now, my children, you know one another — bless you! — be happy!"

After a short but pleasant conversation, Jackson and Lorimer left the room.

"Those are two of the best fellows in the world," said Cuddy, shutting the door after them, "in diametrically opposite ways. They have rooms of their own on the opposite side of the lobby, but they are always with me, or I with them. Now, tell me how you found all at home? What a grand splash you had on the 31st! We saw it all in the *Illustrated*."

"To tell plain truth, it was an awful bore to me," Stevie replied; "but the dear old governor was pleased, and the mater too; so it was all right in the end."

"Anything discovered about poor Brandon?"

"Nothing. I have called to-day to ask your advice about a matter closely connected with him."

"What is it?"

"Don't be offended, old man, if I say that I may not tell you. I can ask you what I want to know, but must not tell you why I want to know it. You must have perceived at the inquest that there was a secret between us that I cannot reveal."

"I did; and I know well that you are not the man to break your word. Use me just as you please, Stevie, and I shall be delighted to give you any assistance in my power, without asking why or wherefore. What do you want to know?"

"I want to find out one Father Eustace, a Roman Catholic priest, who is, or was, connected with some charitable institution in England."

"Then Lorimer is your man!" Cuddy exclaimed; "he is a great theologian, and he and a distinguished Papist, who knows everybody and everything, are constantly engaged in the profitable occupation of consigning their mutual souls to perdition, each supposing that he is rapidly converting the other. Here, Dagon!"

Dagon responded to the call, in the person of Charley, so christened by Jackson on account of his name of Wantley being associated with dragons.

"Go and tell Mr. Lorimer he is wanted," Cuddy commanded; "but Mr. Jackson is not to come. Quick now!"

Lorimer appeared, and Stephen's wish being explained as far as was necessary, he readily promised to give the latter an introduction to his friend and polemical foe, the Reverend Mr. O'Hara — "only," he added, as he sat down to write the note, "you will excuse my advising you not to let him draw you into a religious argument, unless you happen to be very well up in controversy."

Stephen replied that he would take care of that; and after some more jolly talk and chaff amongst the friends, in which the giant — or Gigas, as they called Jackson — was permitted to join, Stephen took his departure; and not caring to trust himself again in the labyrinths of the Temple, hailed "a Hansom," which he found in King's Bench Walk, and drove off to Finsbury Circus, where the Reverend Mr. O'Hara resided.

He found there a brawny middle-aged Irishman, who received him with the greatest *bonhomie*, and laughed a rich deep laugh, that matched well with his rich deep brogue, at almost every remark he made.

"Assist you — Ha! ha! ha! Of course I will — if I can. Glad to see any friend

of Lorimer's! — Ha! ha! ha! So you want to find Father Eustace, eh? — Ha! ha! Well, sit ye down — sit ye down — Ha! ha! ha! and before we go any farther ye'll take a bit of lunch with me, for I can't talk on an empty stomach, and I have not tasted bit, bite, or sup, since one o'clock this day." It was then half-past four.

In vain Stephen protested against this exercise of hospitality from a perfect stranger. The jolly priest laughed louder than ever, pooh-poohed his scruples, and rang the bell. The summons was answered by a neat-handed Phillis, who had an intuitive knowledge of what would be wanted, as she returned in about three minutes with a tray, upon which the greater part of a cold fowl, a Strasburg pie, a crusty loaf with its head set on in a confidential and inviting manner, and a foaming tankard of fat ale, were set out on the snowiest of cloths.

Having done ample justice to these good things, to his reverend entertainer's intense delight, expressed by chuckles which surged and bubbled up from depths deep beneath his ample waistcoat, Stephen found that he had been hungry, and gave the most practical admissions of that fact, notwithstanding all he had declared to the contrary. At last the tray was cleared off. "And now," said the padre — crossing his comfortable legs and drawing back his chair — "now to business. Are ye quite sure ye'll not take a glass of toddy, or anything else?"

"Quite sure!"

"Just to settle the pie!" insinuated the jolly priest.

"Many thanks — no. I never touch spirits."

"Ye're wrong. Indeed, ye're wrong — Ha! ha! ha! A jug of wholesome punch — in moderation, mind — is the stomach's best friend."

"What would the Temperance folks say to that doctrine?"

"That! for the Temperance folks," replied Mr. O'Hara, snapping his fat fingers. "Let those who cannot master their appetites take an oath to touch nothing, for fear they should take too much; but let moderate men enjoy the good things Providence gives them, in their own way."

"Well," said Stephen, smiling, "I did not expect —"

"Did not expect what?"

"Why, if I must finish a sentence imprudently began, I did not expect to hear such — such —"

"Go on — Ha! ha! ha! Such common-sense from a priest, eh? Was that what you were going to say?"

"Something like it," said Stevie, "I must confess."

"Know us a little longer, and a little more, my boy," replied Mr. O'Hara, with more earnestness than he had yet displayed, "and ye'll find that treating human beings as human beings, and talking common-sense to them, is the secret of the hold we have on our parishioners. Your clergy, for the most part, preach over the heads of the poor. This, and your pew system, is what keeps them from your churches. But, to business — to business — Ha! ha! ha! Ye want to discover Father Eustace."

"I do; and if you will —"

"Sure, I'll do anything for ye that I can. But tell me now, first of all, what's his surname?"

"His surname?"

"Faith, yes; a man has two names, if he's a Christian; and Eustace sounds to me more like a Christian name than a surname."

"I never thought of that," said Stephen, in a tone of vexation.

"Maybe he is a foreigner?"

"That I cannot say. All I know of him is, that he was connected with some Institution (which I suppose to be in England) within the last twenty years. I own it it seems absurd to trouble you upon so meagre a clue."

"Not a bit of it — Ha! ha! ha! What made me ask you if he is a foreigner is, that our priests are not usually called by their Christian names in this country. Maybe it is a surname after all. Eustace — Eustace! Eustace! The name seems familiar too. Where can I have heard it? Faith, I have it!" The padre did not laugh this time, but grew suddenly grave, and asked abruptly — "What do you want him for?"

"That, I may not tell you."

"Hum! Will you tell me what you don't want him for, if I put a few questions to ye?"

"Certainly."

"If ye did find him out, would it be to his detriment?"

"No. I want him to direct me to a certain place — no more."

"And if he directed you to this place, whatever or wherever it may be, would anything happen prejudicially to one of our faith?"

"On the contrary, an act of justice would be performed, in which I believe

every good Christian, be he Protestant or Catholic, would rejoice."

" You are connected with the law ? " said the priest quickly.

" Not I."

" Or with some public department ? "

" No. I am acting as a private individual, attempting to carry out the wishes of a friend who died before he could fully express them."

" One question more, and I have done. Supposing that you are enabled to carry out those wishes fully, will they, in your judgment, and upon the honor of a gentleman, affect, directly or indirectly, the propagation of the Holy Faith (here the priest crossed himself), in this country, or abroad ? "

" I think I can say, conscientiously, that they will *not*. I give you my honor, that, if I find them likely to do so, I will make no use of any information I may glean from Mr. Eustace in carrying them out. I can say no more."

" You have said enough. I will give you a letter to a person who I have every reason to believe *can* tell you what you require to know. Whether he *will*, or not, is a matter for himself. Excuse me for a short time." So saying, Mr. O'Hara left the room, and returned in about a quarter of an hour with a note in his hand.

" It is usual, I know," he said, " to send letters of introduction open, but you must excuse my sealing this. Go to the person to whom it is addressed," he continued, handing Stevie the note; " only, mind, I do not say he *will* assist you, I only think he *can*."

They then talked of things in general, and the jolly priest began to laugh again.

It was too late that day for Stephen to follow up his search; but the next afternoon he proceeded to the address given by O'Hara, and sent up the letter of introduction with his card.

He was shown into a spacious room with folding doors. The carpet was of the thickest velvet pile, into which the foot sank deep at every step. The furniture, which was of the most elegant and costly description, was of walnut, covered, where covering was required, with morocco leather of a dark green tint. Curtains of dark green cloth, bound with gold twist, half closed the plate-glass windows. A few choice water-color drawings hung upon the walls, and statuettes in alabaster and bronze of rare beauty were sprinkled here and there, unobtrusively, throughout the apartment, around all sides of which ran a low bookcase well stored with richly

bound volumes. Stephen saw at a glance that he was in the domain of a man of wealth and taste; and, absorbed in contemplation of so many pleasing objects, did not perceive that the folding-doors had opened, and that its master was standing between them, watching him.

He was a man of about forty—slight and tall, and dressed entirely in black. His brow was broad and massive, his face pinched and sharp in the lower portion, and he had glittering, restless eyes, which seemed to eat into anything upon which they fixed. He fixed them upon Stephen Frankland as he turned, and the cold piercing glance sent a shudder creeping through him from head to heel. The manner of this person, though distant, was courteous in the extreme—a wonderful contrast, though, to that of the jovial priest in Finsbury Circus.

" Captain Frankland, I presume ? " he said, bowing politely. " Pray be seated. You have seen Mr. O'Hara ? "

" I have; upon a subject which, doubtless, he has named in his letter."

" He has done so. You seek information respecting Father Eustace ? "

Stephen bowed assent.

" He was here last night. He sat, if I recollect aright, in the very chair which you now occupy."

" Then he lives in England ? " exclaimed Stephen, delighted with the news.

" Well, hardly so. He had just arrived from Copenhagen when I saw him, and early this morning he sailed for Australia."

Stephen's bright look fell.

" Will he be away long ? " he asked.

" He cannot tell; no one can tell how long he may remain. He may return by the next mail; he may spend the rest of his life there."

" I owe you an apology for asking so apparently vague a question," said Stephen; " but as he is not approachable, can you put me in the way of—"

" Ascertaining what institutions he has been connected with ? " interposed the gentleman with the restless eyes, consulting O'Hara's letter, which he held open in his hand. " Certainly. He was educated at Stoneyhurst. You are, probably, acquainted with that college ? "

" I cannot say that I am," said Stephen.

The previous speaker smiled, and continued: " He became one of its professors of theology. Subsequently, he was made Master of St. Patrick's Catholic Schools here, in London, and left them to be Confessor to the Queen of Spain. His next appointment was as Chaplain in the Work-house

at Skibbereen in Ireland, and afterwards he acted for some time as Secretary to the Principal of one of our Convents, at Hull. His movements upon leaving this were very unsettled; do you wish me to follow them? I can do so."

"I am giving you an infinity of trouble."

"Not at all. First he went to New York; from thence to Mexico; from thence he returned for a short time to the Isle of Jersey; from thence he passed to France, Constantinople, and Bengal. He was at Calcutta for, let me think, eighteen months, and then —"

"Pardon me! It may save you some trouble if I ask, Was he connected during this time with any institution in which an English person of the grade of a domestic servant would enter?"

"No; his last appointment, bearing anything like a permanent character, was that which I have mentioned at Hull."

"May I ask in what year he filled this?"

"He went in 1840, and left in 1845."

"And since that time he has been travelling abroad?"

"Exactly."

"Then I think I have gained the clue I seek."

"I hope you may be successful in carrying out your object." And the speaker fixed his glistening eyes on Stephen's, as though he were looking through them into his mind and reading it there.

Stephen thanked him for his wish, and the service rendered towards fulfilling it, and took his leave well satisfied with that day's work. He determined to go to Hull by the night mail, but, having plenty of time to spare, thought he would look up Cuthbert Lindsay again and acquaint him with the progress he had made.

Cuddy was out when he called, and so was Gigas; but Lorimer was in, hard at work upon some pleas.

"I won't disturb you," Stevie said; "I only came to tell Cuddy I was going out of town for a day or two, and to thank you for the very valuable assistance you have rendered me."

"You've found out what you wanted then?"

"Thanks to you, I have."

"From O'Hara?"

"No; from a friend of his to whom he recommended me."

"Who was that, if I may ask?"

"Certainly." And Stephen repeated the name which was written on the letter. Lorimer appeared greatly astonished at what he heard.

"Indeed! and did you see him?"

"Yes."

"And he told you — ?"

"Exactly what I wanted to know — at least, I hope so."

"I should not have thought he would," said Lorimer musingly.

"Why not?"

"Because he is not the sort of man to give information without knowing exactly how it is to be used."

"Do you know him, then?"

"Only by name. Who does not?"

"I, for one," replied Stevie. "Who, and what, is he?"

"You don't mean to say that you don't know?"

"Not I. He seems to be a man of taste, and speaks like a gentleman."

"*He is the General of the Jesuits*," said Lorimer; "take care what you are about, if what you have to do should interfere with any of the schemes of his order."

Stephen was not so much struck as Lorimer expected with this discovery. The Jesuits and their chief were nothing to this honest-hearted young soldier. The man had been civil enough, and might have easily declined to give the information if he had not wished to do so. He had entered into minute details respecting the movements of Father Eustace, and so showed that he had nothing to conceal about him. This Stephen explained to his new acquaintance, and so the matter ended for the present.

The next morning found him in Hull, at the Convent gate; but in the mean time he had thought a little more deeply about Lorimer's warning. "From excess of caution," he thought, "they may perhaps throw some obstacles in my way, so I will not ask if they know anything about Susan's sister, but boldly take it for granted that she is here." So when his summons was answered by the porteress he said —

"I want to see Mary Alston."

To which the porteress replied, "Please to step in, Sir, and I will tell her."

She is here, then, thought Stephen. So far so good, and he entered the Convent hall.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHECK!

The Convent was an ordinary street house, or rather, three ordinary street houses knocked into one; and there was

nothing about its appearance, external or internal, as far as Stephen could see, to indicate anything peculiar in the mode of life of its inhabitants. It might have been a boarding-house, a school, the residence of a very large family, a "special" hospital, or, indeed, anything else. Butchers and bakers came to its door, as to others; received their orders, and sometimes did a little bit of flirtation on their own account with servants of the ordinary type. Postmen brought letters and passed them into the letter-box for every one to take her own and read what she listed. Through a glass door at the end of the hall Stephen could see that there was a large and well-laid-out garden behind the house, and in the room into which he was shown to wait he found most of the periodicals of the day, from the *Quarterly Review* down to the current number of *Punch*, which openly displayed an illustration by no means flattering to the Pope.

For a man naturally diffident and shy of strangers as was Stephen Frankland, he had hitherto got on remarkably well in his interviews. The *bonhomie* of O'Hara, and the curiosity and excitement which his visit to the General of the Jesuits had roused, prevented him from plaguing himself with a dozen-and-one tiresome scruples which would have stood in his way under other circumstances. But now that he had so far successfully pursued the track, and was, as he supposed, on the very verge of an important discovery, he felt as restless and apprehensive as a child. "If it were a man now," he thought, "that I am going to see, I should know how to deal with him; but a woman! — and of all sorts of women a nun! What am I to say to her? How open the subject? Suppose she begins to cry, or faints, what on earth am I to do? Of course she has been taught to consider all men monsters of iniquity, and if I am not awfully careful she may get frightened, and refuse to tell me anything."

As Stephen thus mused, a woman, dressed as a Sister of Charity, in a plain black stuff dress, and plain white linen cap fastened with a broad band under the chin, entered the room, closed the door behind her, and stood with her arms folded — as servants sometimes stand waiting for orders — close inside it.

Though her posture was that of a dependent, there was no token of dependency in her demeanor. A more masculine figure — a harder and more cruel-looking face, than that which she turned upon him, Stephen never remembered to have seen,

as she stood biting her thin bloodless lips, and staring at him boldly under her contracted brows.

Stephen bowed, and placed a chair for her.

"You have sent for me," she said, waving aside the proffered seat; "what do you want?"

"I am going to ask you to let me have a few moments' conversation with you. Pray take a chair."

"No."

"Then I must stand too," said Stephen, rising.

"You can do as you please. Go on with what you have to say."

"First let me be sure that I am troubling the right person. Do I address Miss Alston?"

"My name is Mary Alston."

"Then will you be good enough to give me the address of your sister?"

"I have no sister."

"Indeed! Am I not correct in supposing that you have a sister named Susan, who once — long ago — lived at Mangerton Chase?"

"I had such a sister; but she broke all ties of relationship when she went to the house you have mentioned. She has been dead to me for more than twenty years. She is dead to all now."

"Dead!" exclaimed Stephen.

"It is little I hear or care to know of those whom I was associated with in other days," replied the stern Sister of Charity; "but I have lately learned that she is dead. She has my prayers, but neither my pity nor my regret. She should have died long ago."

"It is not for me to ask why one in your position should speak so bitterly of a near relative," said Stephen, disgusted at her harshness. "I have only now to request, as I cannot get the information from her, that you will be so obliging as to direct me to Mangerton Chase?"

"How can I?"

"Your sister lived there?"

"Well?"

"Surely, if, as I gather from what you have just said, her going there gave you offence, you must be able to tell where she went?"

"She left her home," said Mary Alston, "contrary to the wishes of her parents, and against my advice. Her home was too quiet and religious for her frivolous and sinful mind. She persuaded her youngest sister to accompany her, and led the wretched girl to her perdition here and hereafter. They shook the dust off their

feet against us, and we closed our doors and our thoughts to them forever. I know that she who was once my sister Lucy brought disgrace upon our honest name. I know that she who was once my sister Susan took menial service in some great man's family. I know no more."

"Not even the name of that family?"

"No."

"Or where is Mangerton Chase, in which they lived?"

"No."

"God help me!" moaned Stephen, "this is bad news indeed. Pray excuse my being importunate. I do assure you I am actuated by no idle curiosity. To find Mangerton Chase is of the greatest importance to me. Think — consider well, before you reply. Can you give me no clue to it — no clue to any one who may know it, or the name of its owner?"

"None."

"Will you tell me where you lived when your sisters left home?"

"Close to Ipswich."

"Do you know where they went from thence?"

"First to Cambridge, and then to London."

"And how long after their departure from Ipswich was it that you heard your sister Susan had gone to live at Mangerton Chase?"

"About eighteen months. She deceived us by getting some stranger to direct the letter in which she stated where she had gone, otherwise we should not have opened it."

"One question more," said Stephen, "and I will trouble you no further. Is her husband alive?"

"I was not aware till three days ago that she had been married."

"Some of your family may know; will you —"

"By associating herself with what brought shame upon us all, she was disowned by her family. There is not a member of it, now that my father and mother are no more, who are aware such a person existed."

"She might have written to some of her relations unknown to you?"

"Perhaps."

"Will you enable me to see some of your connections to ask?"

"No."

"You have a reason for declining, I suppose?"

"I have. I do not choose to rake up old sores to please a stranger."

"Believe me that I wish to do no such

thing. I pledge you my word that I will not mention your sister's name, but only ask if they know Mangerton Chase."

"They will not know it."

"How can you tell?"

The Sister of Charity made no reply, but stood motionless, as she had stood all the while, with her arms folded, biting her thin lips, her cold stern gaze fixed on Stephen.

"Am I to understand you as still refusing?" he asked, after a long and, to him, embarrassing pause.

"You are."

"Then," said Stephen, "I can do no more, and so I take my leave."

The Sister of Charity stepped three paces aside to let him pass, but did not return his bow, and left the room by an opposite door, without glancing to the right or left.

"It's queer, isn't it," said the porteress to one of the other servants, soon after she had let Stephen out, "that Sister Mary should have had three visitors since Monday?"

"Lor, Anne! what of that?" said the person addressed; "why, some of the ladies have four or five every week."

"So they do," replied the porteress; "but I've been here sixteen years come Christmas, and I never knew her have *one* person to see her all that time. Now *three* come one after the other. There's something up, I'll be bound. I wonder what it is?"

If Sister Mary had been willing to tell Stephen all she knew, and the result had come to nothing, the chances are that his failure upon, as he thought, the very brink of success, would have dashed his spirits and made him very hopeless for the future. There are some people, however, for whom opposition is the best spur, and Frankland was one of them. "No," he said to himself — dealing his knee a mighty thump, as the train started with him back again to London — "no, I'll see her hanged first! I'll not give it up. I'll find Mangerton Chase yet, in spite of all the Sisters of Charity that ever scowled. The old catamaran! I wonder if her relations could have told me anything? Mangerton Chase — Mangerton Chase. Confound it! It sounds a name that everybody ought to know — like Alton Towers, or Haddon Hall, or Belvoir Castle; but nobody seems to have ever heard of it. If it were not for 'Susan's' letter I should doubt there was such a place, and treat it as a myth of poor Brandon's delirium — like the woman he fancied he saw sitting by the

window. Then, if it wasn't for the armory and the tapestry that he spoke of, one might fancy it to be some cockney affair, built by a retired cheesemonger. But no! It's an *old* house — that's clear. It's probably a *large* house; for, according to old catamaran — (by which unfattering expression Stevie was wont, in his own mind, to designate Sister Mary) — her sister took service in some great man's family. Ha, ha! she did give me one wrinkle, in spite of her teeth, though I ought to have known it before from what Brandron hinted. It's a *noted* house, or he would have told me where it was. He evidently took it for granted that I should know, or easily ascertain, and so devoted his mind to describing whereabouts in it the papers would be found."

Thus musing, Stephen began to recall what Brandron had said on various subjects, and remembered the fears expressed by him, lest, in an unwary moment, he had betrayed to his murderer where the papers were concealed; and a moment's consideration of this point sufficed to knock on the head a scheme which Frankland had formed. It would not do to advertise. He had no doubt but that an inquiry touching Mangerton Chase in that mysterious second column of *The Times* would bring him a dozen answers, particularly if the hope of a reward were held out to the informer. But then, it would give a very dangerous hint to others, if Brandron had made known the depositary of the secret. There was just a chance, Stephen thought, that the person or persons interested in preventing its being brought to light would not, or perhaps could not, act immediately upon the information; but the moment they found out that some one else was on the track, they would be sure not to lose a moment. "They must know well enough where Mangerton Chase is," Stephen thought, "and could be beforehand with me. No, no; it would not do to advertise, except as a last resource, and the time has not yet come for that. I have not seen much of England out of our own county. I'll do a little travelling some day soon, and see if I cannot hit upon this mysterious house that way. It's no use my bothering my head about the clue, — that's done for. I'll be bound, that if ever I find Mangerton Chase at all, I shall stumble upon it by accident, and when I least expect to hear of it."

So he returned to London, and deposited Brandron's property, under seal, with his agents. "I may know," he thought, "some day, perhaps, for whom it was in-

tended." Then he went back to Tremlett Towers, and settled down quietly in his home. He remarked no particular changes in it or its ways. It seemed to him that he had taken up with it again pretty nearly about the point at which his connection was broken off, and that all the years he had spent in India went for nothing. The trees had grown a little, and Frank had grown a great deal; the ivy had overrun the old portion of the house, somewhat thicker and prettier, and there had been a change of under-servants, — that was all. To others, though, — to those who had become familiar with the state of things which the "dear Francis" régime had inaugurated, — there was a change indeed. Lord de Cartarett, and Spencer Harvey, the Nevilles, Corytons, Markbys, Mainwarings, and scores of other pleasant and hearty young fellows who had been Stevie's chums in former days, but who, as we have seen, had lately begun to fight shy of "The Towers," on account of the airs and graces assumed by "dear Francis," rallied round his brother and themselves; and their division of the county of Derby was a gayer place that bright August than it had been for many a long day.

You see, Tremlett Towers had come to be considered the "great house" of the district (for Lord de Cartarett, though a peer, was by no means a rich man, and, being a bachelor, had let his grand house to some people who were not visited); and possibly you may be aware that it is not lawful to do anything in the country that is not first done at the great house. If the great house gets up picnics and archery-meetings, or if its sons patronized the village cricket-club, then picnics and archery-meetings are charming recreations, and it is quite the thing for everybody to go and witness the great match between "our club" and the "eleven," from Muddleborough. But if the initiative be taken in any other quarter, — no matter how well everything may be done, — Materfamilias must impress upon her daughters the impropriety of joining this picnic, or attending that archery-meeting, and wonder what pleasure any one can find in seeing a lot of low fellows knock a ball about.

It follows, therefore, that if the great house chooses to be stupid and sulky, all the country within reach of its influence must be stupid and sulky in company. When Stevie had been at hand to take all the trouble of arrangement off her hands, and before poor Sir George had been extin-

gnished as a motive power in his wife's house, Lady Tremlett had been a great patron of such amusements as I have indicated ; but Mr. Tremlett had no taste for them. They were frivolous and puerile, he said ; and as his wisdom increased, so the country became more and more stupid. At first his lady mother missed the gayeties in which she used to shine, — a bright and particular star ; and once or twice feebly suggested it would be very nice to do this, that, or the other ; but she lacked the energy to move herself, even for her own pleasure ; and after Sir George had been snubbed sufficiently for attempting to move on her behalf, the once accustomed diversions faded away, and grave, stately dinner-parties, from which, as soon as the coffee had been served, the guests fled as from the plague, and now and then a solemn meeting of the county archaeological society, became the only diversions contributed by, or patronized by, the great house.

This was a state of affairs of which Stephen had no knowledge. He began to do just as he had done before, to the great delight of his mother and discomfiture of "dear Francis," without imagining for a moment that he was doing anything strange or new. It all came so natural to him. Every one was pleased by this except Mr. Tremlett, who saw his power oozing gradually away, and had nothing upon which he could fix a complaint, — for Stephen, in the innocence of his heart, would treat him as the dear little Frank of former days ; and, "I say, old fellow, we're going to have a match with Castleton on Thursday, and as you're a muff, and can't play, you're to come and score," — or, "I say, old fellow, the maminie says we're to get up a picnic at the Waterfall," — or, "I say, old fellow, look sharp, and get out your archery-tackle, for the Coleman girls, and Miss Lee and the Nevilles, are coming over to shoot after luncheon, and we are going to try and have the next club-meeting here," was the manner in which he would arrange such matters as far as his brother was concerned. And when the disgusted Mr. Francis would begin to preach against such trivialities, he would be told to "shut up ;" and when he attempted to excuse himself from participating in them upon the ground of having some important engagement elsewhere, at Quarter Sessions or the like, he would be told, — which was worse than all, — that they would get on very well without him, or that he was to "come along, like a good fellow."

Portly Mrs. Coleman's delight at this opening of markets for her girls was great ; but she was somewhat bewildered by it ; for her designs on Stephen Frankland were greatly deranged by the attentions which Lord de Cartarett began to pay her eldest daughter. Uneasiness, however, on this score, was amply counterbalanced by the secret joy she felt at seeing that a far greater catch, — namely, Percy Coryton, who was three-and-twenty, had ten thousand a year already, and would be some day an Earl with fifty thousand more, — was rapidly yielding to the fascinations of her "beauty-daughter," Emily. How she blessed our Stevie for bringing about this increase in the circulation of marriageable young men of fortune ! There had been such a tightness in the matrimonial market lately.

All went on, then, as merrily as marriage-bells, till one day something happened which jarred upon Stephen's happy but sensitive heart, and gave him a glimpse behind the curtain that concealed his father's miserable and dependent life, and the worthlessness of the brother whom he loved.

It happened one bright Sunday afternoon, when the Tremlett party, including even My Lady, had agreed to walk home from church, across the fields, accompanied by a goodly detachment from Ruxton Court, who were invited to luncheon at "The Towers," that they sauntered along through the pleasant meadows in ever-changing groups of twos and threes till they came near to a clump of elm-trees upon the side of a hill, from the crest of which the house could be seen in the distance. Here Stephen halted, and shouted out to his brother, who was in the rear of the party, "I say, Frankie, do you remember when last you and I were here ?"

"I cannot say that I do," was the stately reply.

"I have not forgotten. It was the evening before I started for India," Stevie continued to Laura Coleman, who, with Grace Lee, was walking by his side ; "and the poor old boy was awfully cut up about my leaving, — wasn't he now ?"

"He was, indeed," replied Laura.

"Well, we went wandering about in a disconsolate sort of way, till we came here ; and then he asked me to cut my name on the trunk of one of those trees yonder, because he could always see it from the house. When I had carved what he wanted, he said, — 'Oh, Stevie, how long shall you be before you come back ?' I told him, perhaps ten years. 'Then,'

he said, 'cut ten notches under it, and I will come here this day every year and hack one out till you are home again. Come along this way, and I will show it you.'

And he ran on in front; and springing into the hedgerow, near the first of the trees, began clearing away the brambles which partly hid the trunk.

"I don't remember it as well as I thought I did," he added, after a short examination of the bole. "It must be the first beginning at the other end." And he ran on again, and began to do the same thing as before to the last of the elms. By this time the whole party had come up and halted, wondering what he could be doing.

"Looking for my name that I cut on one of these trees just before I went abroad."

"I do not think you will find it," said Mr. Tremlett; "for the tree has been cut down."

"Cut down!" exclaimed Stevie, halting suddenly in his struggles with the bushes.

"Yes; cut down."

"Oh, father!" said the poor fellow, in a reproachful tone; "how came that?"

"My dear Stevie,—my dear boy," exclaimed Sir George, eagerly; "I had nothing whatever to do with it. I dare say the woodman,—I,—I really don't know. If I had thought that you,—you,—I,—that is,—but I assure you I was not consulted about it,—or, or, or,—" stammered the Baronet.

"I had it felled," said "dear Francis," coolly.

"You!" gasped Stevie; "you cut down my tree?"

"Your tree?" replied his younger brother, with a sneer.

"You know what I mean, Frank," Stephen said, in a low tone, and flushing crimson. "I am sorry you did so. Were there not others to cut down?"

"It spoilt the view from my study window," replied "dear Francis;" "and really, I think it most absurd to make such a fuss about an old elm that was not worth sixpence a foot for timber. If you want to see your precious carving, I dare say you'll find it in the wood-stack, if they have not split it up into billets for the fires."

Nothing further was said, and the whole party walked on, leaving Stevie to get out of the hedge, where he had been standing during this conversation, and follow. He did follow; but slowly, and apart from them all, with a sharp pang at his heart.

I have told you, that, with all his strength and all his bravery, he was a very child when his feelings were touched.

He marched on gloomily, and did not perceive that Grace Lee had lagged behind the rest, under pretence of gathering some wild flowers, till he was close up to her.

"Captain Frankland," she said, softly, "all people do not regard the same things in the same way."

"We should quarrel dreadfully if they did," replied Stevie with a gayety he did not feel; "but why do you say so now?"

"Because I see you have taken something to heart which, perhaps, was not meant heartlessly."

"Oh! you are mistaken. I was a little disappointed, of course; but it's all right. I—I don't worry myself about such trifles."

"Do you really think it a trifle?" asked Grace, bringing her gentle earnest eyes to bear just for one second on Stevie's.

Short and diffident as was the glance, it spoke volumes. It drove back the fib which was on the point of Stevie's tongue, tapped at his heart, and opened it to one who, up to this time, he had almost avoided. Could this kind girl, who could read his foolish sensitive thoughts and sympathize with them, be the cold, matter-of-fact, strong-minded Grace Lee, against whom he had been warned?

"I dare say you will think me a great fool, Miss Lee," he said in an under-tone, "if I confess it seems to me that when they cut down that old tree with my name upon it, they cut me away from my home."

"Do not say *they*," was her reply; "but see, Lady Tremlett has stopped, and is waiting for us." And they passed on without another word.

Many a time after this Stephen found himself chatting with Grace Lee. They had mutually began, as Mrs. Malaprop advises, "with a little aversion." Frankland got over this at a bound when he saw, by her sympathizing with him in his first rebuff, that she had feelings congenial to his own; and a letter which Grace received shortly afterwards from Gerty Treherne set right a misunderstanding under which she had labored concerning his delay in visiting his home. He had *not* gone to stay with friends, as she had supposed. He had *not* remained away from his parents to give time for the preparation of a grand reception. The *réception* which had taken place was arranged without his knowledge. He had gone to Westborough to do one kind action, and he had been

detained there by another. In short, he was not such a bad fellow after all.

"What do I think of Captain Frankland now?" she said — in reply to a question from Laura, on their return from the archery-meeting, which, to Lady Tremlett's great delight, *was* held at "The Towers," — "why, I think he is not a bit like his brother."

"You goosey! who ever said he was? Stevie's quite handsome."

"I was not speaking of his face, dear," was the quiet reply.

This interesting "he" was, as we know, an inveterate smoker of cheroots — his Indian life having accustomed him to be hardly ever without one in his mouth. Now, there was every modern appliance in his mother's house, except a smoking-room. So he smoked in his bedchamber whilst he was getting up, smoked in the garden during the day, and smoked in his bedchamber again when he retired for the night, to the dissatisfaction of "dear Francis," who expressed a rooted antipathy to the fumes of the fragrant weed.

One morning, soon after breakfast, he lit up as usual; and, standing upon the grass-plot under his mother's window, began talking to her merrily, cheroot in hand. She had just said how very nice dear Stevie's cigar smelt, and how good it would be for the Magnolia that climbed up the wall to get some of the smoke over its leaves, when "dear Francis" came up, and in an angry voice declared that it was disgusting! Stephen was making the house like a tavern, with his beastly cigars. The process, before described, under which Stevie had unconsciously put down his potent younger brother, had to be kept up as its effect wore away; and the affair of the tree — which Mr. Tremlett considered as a victory — had reinstated him as the great Panjandrum himself for despotism and dignity.

He was echoed, of course, by his lady mother, who observed that it certainly was nasty to have smoking in the house. Upon which Stephen replied, in the gay affectionate tone which he always used towards his mother —

"Then why don't you set up a smoking-room, old woman? You'll want one when all those fellows you've been talking about come down to shoot."

"My friends do not require a smoking-room," said Mr. Francis.

"Then your friends are muffs," was all the reply that Stevie deigned.

Lady Tremlett declared, that to have a smoking-room would be charming, and

they really *must* and *should* have one. "And oh, Stevie," she said, "puff, puff, puff — directly. Puff some smoke up here — there's such a dreadful bee coming in at the window, and he's going to sting poor me — the nasty thing!"

So Stevie laughed, jumped on a garden-seat, and puffed long whiffs of tobacco-smoke at the intruder — and whether, like "dear Francis," he did not fancy nicotine, or had some other business to transact instead of stinging Lady Tremlett, I cannot say — but off he went; and off My Lady's mind went, after him, the idea of setting up a smoking-room.

Stephen, however, began to cast it over in his, but could not hit upon a locality. This room could not be spared; that was too large; and the other was not conveniently situated. Musing as a man does when he has a good weed between his lips and enjoys it, he sat on the grass beneath one of the huge sycamore-trees, and counted the windows on that side of the house, in order that so the various rooms possible for the contemplated divan might be suggested. "By Jove," he thought, "if there were only just such a little den as the mammie's at the other end of the wing, what a capital place that would be! I wonder if it could be built!"

From the other end of the wing extended a row of silver poplars, as a sort of screen to the lawn. The last tree grew quite close up to the house — so close, that some of the branches grew over the roof, and others ground and chafed themselves away against the masonry. Stevie's bedroom was the last along this side, and he had often been disturbed by the scraping and moaning sound made by the boughs, when there was any wind to move them. He knew there could be no chamber beyond his own, for the passage ended with a dead wall close to his door. He had a good deal of taste for engineering, and I dare say, if he had been born a rich man he would have spent a fortune in bricks and mortar. As it was, he was quite ready and willing to have a finger in the pie at somebody else's expense, and sauntered along with his hands in his pockets, puffing away leisurely at his big cheroot, to survey this unsymmetrical end of the wing.

He scrambled through the evergreens which covered a high bank on which the screen of poplars grew, and jumped on the top of a dwarf-wall in their rear. What was his astonishment to find that there *was* an oriel window, exactly similar to that of his mother's *boudoir*, entirely concealed from without by the surrounding foliage,

and which he had never before seen or heard of! Beneath this was the laundry, the lattices of which opened into the stable-yard at the other side of the dwarf-wall.

"Well, there *must* be a room above," said Stevie, half aloud; "though hang me if I know how they get to it."

He was roused from puzzling himself over this knotty point by hearing his own name called out; and looking down — for the wall was the whole height of the bank on the stable-yard side — saw his father and brother approaching from the coach-house, where they had been to inspect a new brougham that "dear Francis" had set up for his private use.

"What a boy you are, Stevie," said the Baronet, "climbing about like that. No! don't jump down — you'll sting your feet awfully if you do."

"I'm not going," Stevie said. "Come here! I want to show you something." And he pointed up towards the hidden oriel window.

If Sir George had worn a mask upon his face, and that gesture of his son's had touched a spring which cast it off, the countenance of the former could not have assumed a more thorough change. His gay fussy manner left him in an instant, and he turned deadly pale. Stephen noticed this slightly at the time; but oh! how the remembrance of it made his heart ache afterwards.

"Is there a room up there?" he asked.

"No, no," replied his father, hurriedly, "of course not — that is, I mean, not one that is used."

"Time it was then," replied Stephen; "it's the very place for our smoking-room."

"It has the advantage of being well away from the habitable part of the house, if you *must* have such a place," said Mr. Tremlett.

"We must have this old tree down though," Stevie observed; "it will make it so dark." And he sat down on the top of the wall, and rubbed the stains of climbing off his hands, with a satisfied air, as though the whole affair was settled.

"You will do no such thing!" cried the Baronet, angrily. "I tell you that room is not habitable; it has not been used since you were born, and it has fallen into decay. It's damp and unwholesome; and, and — there's no floor; and — and no furniture; and — I — I won't have that tree touched. I value it exceedingly."

"Well, then, let it stand!" said Stevie; "we shall only want to use the room at night."

"As for its being in decay," chimed in

'dear Francis,' who loved to oppose his father, "that must be looked to, for fear the mildew should get into the beams and affect the rest of the wing."

"And there are half a dozen carpenters about the place eating their heads off for want of something to do, who would put it all to rights in less than no time," continued Stevie.

"I tell you I will not have it touched!" cried his father, stamping with anger. "Are my wishes *never* to be consulted, Francis? That room was shut up before — before — I — you know what I would say. And shut up it shall remain as long as I live, and as long as your mother lives; for her wishes are mine in this respect. There now! And as for you, Stephen, I take it very ill that you should begin to upset all our arrangements and annoy me in this manner almost the moment you come home."

"Oh, very well, Sir," Stevie said, letting himself down from his perch; "if you treat it in that way, there's an end of it at once. I had no notion you were so particular about it. Were you, Frank?"

"I did not even know that there was such a place," was his answer; "but if my mother assures me that it shall be left to rot, of course she must be obeyed."

"Tell me one thing though," said Stephen, with a smile; "is it up there that you keep the ghost?"

His father took him by the arm, and looked him full in the face. His anger ceased as suddenly as it had broken out as soon as the disagreeable project was abandoned; and though still very pale, and trembling in his speech, he spoke collectedly, and with kindness.

"There are some things, my dear boy," he said, "which we Franklands cannot afford to treat with levity. Take my advice, and trouble yourself no further about that room."

"The dear old governor is awfully superstitious, isn't he?" Stephen remarked to his brother when Sir George had left them; "but we must let him have his own way, and find a baccy-den elsewhere." And so they did.

CHAPTER XV.

SHOWS HOW MR. TREMLETT REASSUMED HIS SWAY, AND HOW GRACE LEE SPOILT HER BONNET-STRINGS.

THE Vigil of the Feast of St. Partridge — commonly known as the 31st of August

— was a busy day with Stephen Franklin. We know how fond he was of field-sports, and what pleasant memories he preserved of those old days when the prowess of his eager youth was the delight of his father's shooting parties, and the glory of Bill Grant. Many a bright afternoon did he spend in the harvest fields, sucking away at his big cheroots, and watching the sacred coveys as they basked in the newly-cut stubbles, innocent, as yet, of dog and gun; or followed them with excited gaze, as they skimmed over the hedge-rows when disturbed by the gleaners. He looked forward to "the first" with almost childish impatience. It was so long since he had come face to face with an honest English partridge — and wouldn't he make up, now, for lost time! Sir George had given up shooting for some years. Frank did not care about it; and his friends were not expected till the third. "So," thought Stevie, "I shall have three days quietly to myself. I won't spoil their fun, though. I'll just shoot over the outlying farms, and get as much game as will keep the larder full; and when they are ready to begin, will show them what's what."

With one exception, the expected guests were all strangers to Stephen, and when we recollect that your thorough sportsman is always close and selfish in matters of sport, it will be seen that this concession of the good-hearted fellow was no slight one. Of course he never spoke of it. To do what was right and kind came so natural to him, that he never thought of mentioning the subject. Before he went to India, whilst his father was yet a sportsman, all the shooting arrangements had been confided to him, and now he took them up again as a matter of course.

So he sent for Mr. Maggs — who had succeeded Bill Grant as head-keeper — unpacked, and gave out his guns to be cleaned and put in order; sent for his license; ordered powder and shot; saw that his flasks and other gear were in good condition; went down to the kennels and made friends with the dogs; looked out his shooting clothes; was very particular over the oiling of his boots; fixed the when and where for the morning; talked of birds, and dogs, and guns, incessantly; and fussed about his shooting-tackle as gentlemen will talk and fuss on the eve of Saint Grouse and Saint Partridge. Finally, he had all his things laid on a table in the old hall, where the family pictures and oak carvings (which old Tremlett wanted to have painted white, and gilt) were; and

constantly sauntered up to fidget with them, making the day seem as though it had a hundred and twenty-four hours, with his impatience, and wondering if it would ever come to an end.

Mr. Tremlett was more usefully employed. He had left home at an early hour to attend the County Sessions; had sat at the right hand of the Chairman all day, looking so fearfully wise, that the Judge was compelled at last to ask his opinion upon a very important point — namely, as to whether one month's imprisonment, with hard labor, was a sufficient punishment for a miserable urchin of eight years old, who had pleaded guilty to stealing four turnips, value three farthings. He wisely suggested the addition of a whipping, which was added, to his intense satisfaction and the despair of the blubbering culprit. He returned to "The Towers" swelling with importance, and was crossing the hall, with all his honors thick upon him, when Stephen, engaged in the trivial pursuits already mentioned, bawled out —

"I say, Frankie! are you coming out with me to-morrow?"

"Where?"

"Well, we shall begin at Tittlestead, go over Marsh's Farm and Burridge's, and then try Shenstone Hill. Maggs says there are a lot of birds there, and if we don't drive them down into the meadows, we shall never see them again; because there are such a lot of poaching blackguards about Chapel Furnace."

"Then you are going shooting?"

"What on earth else should I be going to do on the 'first of September'?"

"I think you might have consulted me before you made such arrangements;" replied his brother, stopping short in his triumphant entry.

"Consulted you? you dear old muff!" said Stevie, slapping him on the back. "What do you know about shooting?"

"Dear Francis" tried hard to look dignified; but only succeeded in assuming an expression of stupid surprise, mixed with vexation.

"I must confess," he said, after a pause, "that I have paid little attention to a sport which I consider cruel, and — and — a waste of time. You might, however, have asked my — my per — that is, it would have been more decorous if you had not acted so entirely without — without — and it was a great impertinence of Maggs!" he added, with a burst.

"What was?"

"Taking upon himself to do this without orders."

"My dear boy, he took nothing upon himself. He just told me where the out-lying birds were to be found, and I gave him his orders accordingly," Stephen answered, clicking the locks of his double-barrel, as innocent of what was passing in his brother's mind as the child unborn.

"Does my father know you are going?"
"I believe so."

"And Lady Tremlett?"

"Yes. She has promised to drive me to Tittlestead in the pony carriage."

"You seem to have settled everything to your satisfaction?" observed the dear fellow, with one of his patent sneers.

"Perfectly!" replied the unconscious Stevie. "Will you come?"

"Certainly not!" And the great man turned on his heel and left the hall, with his head in the air.

"All right!" said Stevie, shouldering his gun, and bringing down an imaginary brace of partridges, right and left. "Only look sharp and dress, or you'll be late for dinner."

He was late for dinner. So also were Sir George and Lady Tremlett, and they all came down together, looking very grave. Any one but Stephen would have perceived that there was something wrong, only he was so full of his prospective engagement, and so utterly unconscious of the high treason he had committed, that he paid no attention to their constrained manner, and rattled on just as usual — chaffing Frank and playing with his mother in his usual cheery way.

When prayers were over, he lighted his mother's bedroom candle (as he always did), and, putting it into her hand, kissed her, and said —

"Good-night, mamma, dear! I shall go to bye-bye early, too! for I shall have a long day's work to-morrow."

Generally speaking, she used merely to lift up her cheek to his salute on these occasions; now she threw her arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his affectionately, with a strange look of pity — which he did not notice — in her beautiful eyes. Poor weak thing! she loved him as far as her shallow nature could love anybody. It was too much trouble, however, to try and save him from what had been agreed upon up-stairs, whilst dinner was waiting.

Stephen lit his own candle and followed; but was unable to resist having another last fidget with his dear guns and tackle. Thus engaged, he was joined by his father.

"And so you are going to shoot to-morrow?"

"Of course."

"Well, I hope you'll have a fine day. Is this your gun?"

"Yes."

"Why, it's your old one!"

"And a better never was made. Do you remember giving it to me?"

"That I do. But you really ought to have a breech loader. Every one has a breech loader now. Do let me give you a breech loader."

"By all means, if you like," said Stevie; "but this will last me for some time to come."

"Oh, but you must have a breech loader. I should not like you to go out with Lord Rossthorne and Francis's friends without a breech loader."

"All right."

"And I'll tell you what I'll do," continued the Baronet, fidgeting nervously with a shot pouch, "I'll telegraph to Purday to send one down, and you'll get it before the third."

"How kind you are! I never say nay to a good thing."

"Then you'll put off going out till the third?"

"Why?" answered Stevie, raising his eyebrows.

"You can't go out without a proper gun."

"Bless your heart! I'll back myself and my old gun against any one of them and their new-fashioned things. I'll bet you a pound now that I send home ten brace before two hours."

"Then you are determined to go?" asked the poor Baronet, sadly.

"Why not?"

"But to speak plainly, I — that is, Francis — I mean we all, want to give these people who are coming as good sport as possible, and if you disturb the birds —"

"Do you suppose I have not thought of that?" interrupted his son; "I am going to break along the outskirts in order that they *should* have as good sport as possible."

"But Francis —"

"Oh! he knows nothing about it. Never mind what he says."

"My dear boy," said Sir George, laying his hand upon Stevie's shoulder, gazing sorrowfully in his face, "I am obliged to mind what he says."

Stephen put down his gun and was serious in a moment.

"Frank has been saying something to you about me?"

"He has indeed."

"Tell me what it was."

"Stevie, you know my position here?"

"Go on, Sir."

"I am not my own master; I never was since my marriage; and when your brother came of age the little authority I had on the estate passed away to him. If your mother were to die to-morrow it would be his, and I should be dependent upon him, as I now am upon her. It is painful — bitter in the extreme — for me to speak thus, but it must be said. My poor boy — my poor Stevie, thanks to my own sad follies, we are but lodgers and dependents under the roof beneath which our forefathers have been men and masters."

Stephen thought of the old elm-tree, and the truth began to dawn upon him.

"Don't grieve over what has passed," he said, in a low, saddened tone; "I think I know what you would say, and will save you the pain of saying it. All that about the breech loader was a kind pretext to put me off my intended sport to-morrow?"

"It was indeed."

"Because my brother and my mother" — the last words came with a gulp — "refuse me permission to shoot over their land."

"Only till the third — only till Thursday, dear Stevie — only till Thursday, when —"

"When their *friends* come. I understand. It would have been more manly if he had told me so himself."

"Oh, pray Stevie do not think that I took any part in it. I did my very best. I was very angry. I urged — I entreated; but he was determined, and said he would write, and —"

"You wished to break his unkindness to me. It was like you. God bless you, father; you, I think, are still unchanged to me."

The poor Baronet fairly broke down at this, and sobbed like a child on Stevie's shoulder.

"You cannot think," he said at last, "what bitter letters he can write. He never speaks his mind, he always writes it, and there is a blow in every measured word."

"I would not have thought it of him; but let it be as he wishes;" and Stephen slowly took his gun to pieces, and began re-packing it in its case.

"Oh! don't do that," said Sir George, "don't do that. You shall not lose your sport. Coleman will give you a day — two — a dozen, — with pleasure, I know. I will send over the first thing in the

morning, and ask him. You shall shoot, after all."

"My dear father," replied Stevie, with one of his sad, sweet smiles, "do you suppose it is the loss of the sport which has upset me! Tell me that the first time I fire that gun I shall blow off my right arm and never see a day's sport again, but that what you have told me to-night is untrue, and I will thank you heartily."

"It is his way," pleaded Sir George. "I do not think he means altogether unkindly, but he has a domineering way about him. He thinks that you — that you, being the heir to the title, you — you —"

"Please go on. I should like to hear all, now that you have begun."

"It is a miserable task for me, but I think you are right. I think it only just that you should know all he said of you up-stairs. He wished it to be communicated, and hang me if I spare him. Stevie, although he is my own flesh and blood, I say it, he is a heartless prig and a cur. As for his mother —"

"Stop, stop! Pray let us keep her name out of this. Frank may have her consent, but I do not think her heart goes with it."

"Stevie, it ought to go with it or against it. It is her miserable weakness that makes all this misery. If she had treated me with respect — I don't say a word about affection — Francis would never have thought of behaving towards me as he does."

"It is not for me to hear complaints against my — against Frank's mother," Stevie replied, in a low broken voice. "God help us! — this is indeed an awakening. I pictured you as being so happy and united. I longed so to be amongst you again, to share your happiness. At this moment I cannot realize its being all lost. Frank cannot *mean* what he does. He is thoughtless and conceited, and may have bad advisers. He cannot have a deliberate intention to wound either of us — why should he?"

"I would help you to think so, my boy," said the Baronet, "if I had the slightest hope that any good would come of such a delusion; but it would only lay you open to new wounds — new pain. Stevie, though he is my son, he has not one drop of the Frankland blood in his veins. He inherits his grandfather's obstinate, cruel, *vulgar* pride. He hates me because I am poor. He hates you, because you have won the love and respect he never could gain. Why did he absent himself from

your reception here? Why destroy that old tree? Why has he done a score of paltry spiteful things of which you are yet ignorant? Why! Because he is bitterly jealous of you—that is why! Your popularity is an incessant reproach to him. In getting up all these cheerful gatherings that have made the neighborhood so pleasant, he deems that you have encroached upon his prerogative to make everybody stupid and unsociable like himself. He is burning to avenge himself for it; and he will—mark me, he will! I know him as he is. Oh! it is a comfort to be able to speak my mind about him," said the Baronet, angrily. "He is not worth quarrelling with, Stevie. He has the power to annoy you, which he is cur enough to use relentlessly, if you submit to remain subject to it."

"What would you advise me to do?"

"Stevie! that was the proudest day of my life on which I welcomed you home. I had a foolish hope that your honest, hearty presence—my own dear wife's own child!—would have dispelled this misery," sobbed the poor victim of "settlements"—"but I am hopeless now. The happiest moments in my life are those which I have spent in your society; but this I say, and say deliberately—leave us. Make a home elsewhere, for here you will find only disappointment, injury, and wrong."

"And you?"

"Oh, never mind about me," replied Sir George, trying to force a smile, "I am accustomed to it. I have got thick-skinned. I can stand his cursed airs and nonsense; but I cannot and will not stand seeing them played off on you."

"And there is one thing *I* will not stand, father," said Stephen, with flashing eyes, "I will not stand seeing you made light of by my younger brother. I have no idea of beating a cowardly retreat before what I know to be unnatural and base. I shall have it out with Master Frank, were he fifty times master of Tremlett Towers. So, God bless you, my dear father, for all your kindness to me, and good-night."

But he did not have it out with Master Frank after all. He retired to bed full of great resolves—to speak his mind roundly to that great potentate, and to leave his mother's roof within the hour if his remonstrances were unheeded—but he did what every wise man ought to do with great resolves. He slept upon them; and they had altogether changed before the morning.

He met his brother next morning, before breakfast, pacing up and down a

gravel walk on the lawn—in search, perhaps, of an appetite—and "dear Francis" would have avoided him. Stephen, however, was not to be avoided when he had a duty to perform.

"Frank," he said, "you and I have misunderstood each other on some important subjects—how and why, it is useless now to inquire. I had forgotten that many changes must have happened here during my absence of ten years; and you, I think, have not remembered that I might so forget. You know how greatly I was indulged before I left; and if I have offended you by taking too much upon myself lately, I sincerely ask your pardon, &c. &c."

He paused, expecting that his concessions would be met half-way. He reckoned without his host. His brother was secretly chuckling at his supposed victory, and stood with his head in the air, exulting over Stevie at his banquet of humble pie.

"I was wrong in giving those orders about the shooting," continued Stevie, "without consulting my father."

"Your father," replied Francis loftily, "has nothing whatever to do with the estate."

"Pardon me," said Stevie, sternly; "whatever else may be his position here, he is your father, and as such, in the sight of God and man, Francis Tremlett, his wishes in *every respect* should be consulted, and treated with respect I hope. I shall always so treat them; and this *I know*, that I shall regard any member of my family who fails to do so with the contempt that he deserves."

This idea was quite a novelty with "dear Francis," and its exponent left him utterly nonplussed by it.

And why did not Stevie follow up his advantage. Why did he not quit Tremlett Towers as his father had recommended? Because "sleeping upon it," or rather, spending a sleepless night thinking about it all, he came to the prudent conclusion that a scene with "dear Francis" would not make his father's life more comfortable; and as for himself, he had but a few months to spend in England, and determined to use them as a peace-maker. Besides—and here we come to a very interesting point—there was some one in the neighborhood whom he did not like to lose sight of. Unknown to himself, he was getting fond of Grace Lee—quiet, earnest Grace Lee, who had stood aloof from him during the brief days of his happy return, but whose sympathy had welled forth from

her lustrous eyes when the first breath of unkindness had chilled him. No! he could not quite make up his mind to leave Grace. This was the "besides," and I think he is not the first man whose resolutions have been changed by such a cause.

He spent a good deal of time at Ruxton Court, to the astonishment of good Mr. Coleman, who wondered that so keen a sportsman should care to renounce his favorite sport to wander about with a parcel of girls. Stevie was certainly very attentive to that "parcel," especially when Grace Lee was bound up in it.

They were all botanizers and geologists in a small way; and who so ready to crack the big stones and carry home the bag of, or seek uncomfortable spoil, than gallant Stephen Frankland? And when the Coleman feminines were busy with their *hortus siccus*, their microscope, their cabinet, and what not, in the evening, who so ready to talk with Grace? Grace knew a little more than her companions about such things, and did not care for their A B C work. Perhaps she cared for something else. Who knows?

And what passed during these pleasant tête-à-têtes? I never knew, and for the life of me I cannot guess. Dear ladies! do not some of you know how hearts are lost and won? Will you be good enough, gentle Sir, to state the process under which you managed that little affair with Arabella, who had refused so many good offers? You decline! Well then, there is no help for it. If others less experienced than yourselves desire to make a precedent out of the converse of Stephen and Grace, they must be disappointed. It was all strictly confidential; and, as I have stated in an early part of this family history, I am not going to draw upon my imagination when real persons are doing real things. I have not more space at my disposal than is requisite to tell what I actually know, and what has been commended from trustworthy sources. So if judicious readers must be taught how to lead captivity captive, let them send thirteen postage-stamps to the gentleman who advertises in the papers his ability to confide the many secrets, and they will get a good deal more out of him for that small remuneration than ever they will from me at any price.

One fact, however, I will state, and you may draw whatever conclusions you please from it—

Captain Stephen Frankland, V. C., took to caressing Doggie!

"There are none so blind as those who

will not see," says the proverb, and good Mrs. Coleman furnished no exception to the rule. Having completely made up her mind that Stephen was to be led captive by her daughter Laura, she would see nothing in his walks, his talks, his whispers with Grace, which she considered incompatible with a consummation so devoutly to be wished. Young people are shy and diffident she thought, and like to have a confidante. Had not she been made a confidante scores of times? Had not Edwin made her the depositary of his anxious fears about that beastly Captain Prettyman? And had not Angelina poured forth her sorrows into that sympathizing bosom? Had she not told the swain to "Speak out, and never mind the Captain," and assured the damsel that her admirer had gone off in a tiff? Were not her consolatory words confirmed by the humble and penitential letter which arrived from the love-torn victim by the next post? In short, had she not brought a dozen couples behind a bride-cake by tactics similar to those which Grace was employing now? Grace was a good girl. A nice, affectionate girl, in the eyes of her guardian's wife, for so acting. "And really," thought that lady, "I must see what can be done for her; only, of course, she cannot expect to enter a county family—poor child—with her antecedents."

Mr. Coleman saw more clearly; and one day, when Stevie was lunching at Ruxton Court, the conversation turning upon misalliances, in consequence of an acquaintance having married very much below his own station, Mrs. Coleman remarked—

"Well; if they are happy, poor things, what can it matter?"

"Supposing them to be happy," replied her husband, "is begging the whole question. I don't see much prospect of happiness in this sort of marriage; for if the husband and wife manage to get on well together, it is ten to one their families will set them by the ears sooner or later. No, no; I'm not particular about much love or much money—they'd *come* in time, if the pair are worth their salt; but disparity of rank is the very — What is the matter with you, Bobby?"

"I wath waiting to hear your exclamation of thurprithe," said that incorrigible.

"You're a bad boy," exclaimed his mother, shaking her head at him.

"No, mar, I ain't! And I tell you what, when I mawy I thant mawy a great big wife like pa wants people to. I thal

mawly a little wife, and then I can make her do what I pleathe."

"Just listen to the brat!" exclaimed his delighted mother. "He thinks disparity of rank means difference of size! Well, I think that up to a certain point the one has no more to do with happiness than the other; don't you, Stevie?"

"Stevie," interposed Mr. Coleman, addressing his remark not to his wife or to that person, but to Grace Lee, "is a regular old-fashioned Frankland; and I'll be bound that he would not dream of asking any girl to become his wife who could not show half a dozen quarterings."

Stevie laughed. "Who am I," he replied, "that I should be so particular?"

"A member — the prospective head — of a family that can show a longer, and, taking it altogether, a purer pedigree than half the House of Peers can boast of — that's all!" said Mr. Coleman. "You are proud of your family tree, and you know it. The old Franklands took their wives out of families like their own, and they were happy. Some of them looked higher, and a few lower, but no good came of it, or ever will."

"Well I'm sure, Coleman!" observed his wife, pausing in helping the great pie, "you're going on at a fine rate. Stevie's family is a very good and a very old one, but I hope there are many others equal to it in which good *has* come of making high matches. I like a family to *rise*, as I told my poor sister Janet when Lord Ballysquander proposed for her. Not that there was much of a rise in her marriage; for my father was a Spencer on the mother's side, and my own dear mother was the grand-daughter of an earl. All your family, too, are highly respectable, though they were lawyers to begin with."

"Who said they were not, my love?"

"And although poor Janet died in her first confinement — (dear! dear! how scandalously they mismanaged her!) and James — I mean Lord Ballysquander — has been twice a widower since, he always calls me his dear sister — always! So I'm sure you must not go trying to set people against our — our family."

"I'm sure I never thought of doing such a thing. I merely say that people should not marry out of their station."

"But Lord Ballysquander —"

"Bother Lord Ballysquander!"

"That's right! abuse my relations because you have not a — because you are jealous of the good blood your children have got in their veins."

"Not at all."

"You are! You know you are! We must introduce you, Stevie," she continued, addressing her guest, "to Lord Ballysquander; you will like him so much. He is so con — so kind."

"Particularly when he wants anything," growled paterfamilias.

"I am ashamed of you, Coleman, talking like that! Poor dear man! he is the most open-hearted being alive; and I'm sure you behaved shabbily about that mortgage."

"My love!" said Mr. Coleman — "business!"

"Bah!" ejaculated his wife; but the subject was dropped, and she went on helping the pie, to Bobby's great relief.

Stephen Frankland had forgotten all about this subject before the cloth was removed; but there was one present into whose heart it had sunk deeply.

"Let him be proud!" burst — (*apropos* of nothing — in what I am afraid I must call a vixenish tone) from the lips of Grace Lee, accompanied by what was undoubtedly an impatient gesture — a stamp of the foot, I think — as she tied her bonnet-strings before the glass that afternoon. "Let him be proud! I can be proud too. It is cruel! cruel! cruel!! to despise a poor girl because she is left alone in the world, and does not know — never knew — ah! but I can despise too, and I *will*." Here then came a lug at the poor strings, which did not improve their appearance.

Afterwards they all went out for a walk, accompanied by Doggie; and really it seemed at first as though that morose and repulsive quadruped must have recently bitten his fair mistress, so altered was her manner to every one. It was only when, upon their return, they visited the old colliery, and Stephen told how it had been drowned the year after he was born, and spoke so humbly, but withal so contentedly, of that calamity, making him a poor man when otherwise he would have been a rich one — that Grace looked down at her tumbled bonnet-strings, and the sweet smile which was born that day when Stevie missed the old memorial elm mantled upon her soft, fresh cheek.

Bonnie Grace Lee! Henceforward, if you please, "our Grace," for our Stevie — my Stevie — my dear, true old friend, is getting dear to her; and if there be any truth in the language of eyes, she is getting very dear to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DISCOVERY.

THE very day on which Stephen Frankland did *not* leave Tremlett Towers, and Grace Lee spoilt her bonnet-strings, was to have been rendered one of fasting and humiliation to many inoffensive inhabitants of Durmstone and the neighborhood, by reason of its being fixed for one of Mr. Tremlett's solemn dinner-parties; but by a daring innovation of his brother's, executed some days before the affair of the old elm-tree, the Coleman girls, and one or two intimate friends of Stevie, were invited in the evening.

"Going to give a dinner!" this rebel had exclaimed, in his hearty off-hand way. "All right! Get the mannie to ask a few girls, and we'll have a hop afterwards."

This was said in the presence of Lady Tremlett, who became so charmed with the idea, that "dear Francis" did not think it prudent to oppose it. There were some thousands a-year at My Lady's disposition, to do what she pleased with by will.

So the little hop came off, and, for the first time since she had come to Derbyshire, Grace Lee was seen to dance. She danced with Stephen once; and then with Lord de Cartarett twice; and then with Percy Neville; and then declared that she hated dancing, and would no more of it. She would play for them the rest of the evening; and she did so — Stephen sometimes sitting by her side, and talking to her the while; for it so happened there were more bachelors than girls, and he liked his friends to have partners. Between the dances, and at supper, Grace and our Stevie had a good deal of conversation upon a variety of subjects — more solid than the usual talk of ball-rooms; for Stephen had long since found out that beneath her proud and strange manner was a soft and kindly heart, and a vein of sterling common-sense that was well worth working. "Ah," he had thought more than once, "if I might confide poor Brandon's affairs to her and ask her advice, I might get some hints worth having."

Later on in the evening somebody introduced the subject of the oak carvings in the old hall, and several of the guests went away there to examine them afresh. Grace had never seen them at all, she said, or been in the ancient part of the house.

"Haven't you, really?" said Stephen; "then pray come with me, and I will show you all sorts of queer things."

He was as good as his word. Old ar-

mor, old pictures, old banners, quaint old furniture, were just the things in which Grace delighted.

"O what dear old things!" she exclaimed in her own voice and manner (she had somebody else's voice and manner which she used to Stevie until recently), "what dear old things! Haven't you got a ghost story to match?"

"To be sure! And, as it's very short, I'll tell it to you now."

No better time and place could there be for such a tale. The harvest moon sent a flood of light through the wide, unshuttered casements, making those parts of the old hall into which the light did not penetrate dark and gloomy with an unnatural darkness and gloom. The moulderings banners waved to and fro solemnly in the vaulted roof, like pendulums of some huge and goblin timepiece that was marking, at every beat, the flight of centuries. Armed warriors and dames of ancient race frowned from dark oaken-framed pictures on the walls, and here and there a rusty suit of mail seemed as though it were endowed with unearthly life, and was moving in the fitful and uncertain light, as Frankland moved here and there the solitary lamp which lit up the silent darkness, bringing into life strange and uncouth shadows.

So engrossed was Grace in the recital, that she did not notice the departure, one by one, of the other guests, and that she and Stephen were left alone in the old hall.

"Wonderful!" she said, when he had concluded, "and, of course, perfectly true. It would never do to doubt a ghost story in a place like this. But who is that dreadful-looking old fellow up there?" pointing to one of the pictures. "Is that the ghost?"

"That! Oh, you must not call him a dreadful old fellow. That's my famous ancestor, Roger Frankland. He is not the ghost, though he has made many in his day. He was a famous navigator, and did some things upon the Spanish Main which will not bear moralizing upon; but he fought with Drake and Frobisher against the Armada, and afterwards went down to the bottom of the sea in his ship, with his glorious flag flying, sooner than strike it to three Dutch men-of-war. That young looking man to the right, in the drab coat, was the friend and schoolfellow of Hampden, and next to him is Clarence Frankland, Knight Banneret, who died on the field of Agincourt."

"You are proud of your ancestors."

"Proud? I should think so! Are not you of yours?"

The instant that the words had passed his lips he knew that he had made an unlucky speech. Grace flushed crimson, and then turned deadly pale. Stephen tried to change the subject, but she returned to it.

"And yet you admit that one, at least, of them was a thief."

"A thief!"

"Exactly. Is not taking other folks's property by force, *thieving*, when done on the Spanish Main, quite as much so as if the scene were in Regent Street?"

"Well," said Stevie smiling, "as I said before, we must not mention about old Roger. They thought differently of those things in his day. But I am tiring you?"

"No. I like these remembrances of bygone days. I like to hear of your forefathers; and, do you know, I much prefer the old part of this house, in which they lived and died, to the new part, for all its splendor."

"So do I."

"And the old name is far better than the new one."

"Ah, yes," replied Stephen sadly; "the old name will soon fade out and be forgotten."

"It is almost entirely forgotten now, I am told," said Grace.

"That's not complimentary to me."

"Why so?"

"Because I bear it. I am, and always shall be, a Frankland."

"Oh, I was not speaking of the name of the family, but the name of the house."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know, it was not always called Tremlett Towers."

"Always! I never heard it spoken of by any other."

"Perhaps it was before you were born," said Grace, in a musing tone.

"What was?"

"That the name of the house was changed."

"You must be mistaken. Its name never was changed. Who told you it was?"

"A poor creature down in the village, whom I visit now and then. She never calls it Tremlett Towers."

"What then, in the name of fortune?"

"She is a very old woman, and calls it by its old name."

"And that was —?"

"MANGERTON CHASE!"

The lamp fell from Stephen's hand; and he reeled, and fell, as though he had been shot through the brain.

The piercing shriek forced from Grace Lee by the strange consequences of her lightly-uttered words brought Sir George Tremlett and his guests hurrying to the spot. The lamp was broken and extinguished in its fall, and a cloud having just obscured the moon, the old hall was left in utter darkness. The Baronet ran as fast as any one along the passage which led to it, but when he came to the door and looked into the black silence beyond, he hung back and called loudly for lights, surrounded by a group of wondering men and panic-stricken ladies, who knew not where to go or what to think.

Lord de Cartarett and Percy Neville rushed back into the drawing-room, and seizing each a pair of branches, forced their way through the bewildered crowd, and sprang forward into the centre of the hall, calling out — "Who is here? What has happened. Speak, for God's sake, whoever you are!" and waving about the lights so that their feeble rays might fall into the shadow-shrouded recesses and gloomy corners of the ancient place.

It so happened that they began their search on the wrong side, and it was some minutes before they came round to where old Roger Frankland, the Buccaneer, frowned from the mouldering canvas, and there — on the floor below — they found the insensible body of Stephen Frankland, and close beside him Grace Lee, speechless with terror, and clinging for support to a huge oaken chest against which he had fallen, as evidenced by a deep cut upon the forehead, from which he was bleeding profusely.

"Good God!" exclaimed Lord de Cartarett, "he is killed. Who has done this?"

Grace Lee's lips moved, and she made a gesture with her hand, which recalled those who had started away to search for his supposed assailant, but she could not speak. Nevertheless, she was the first to kneel down by his side, to feel his wrist and place her hand upon his heart, and, whilst eagerly counting its faint throbings, pressed her little handkerchief firmly upon the red gash which marked his brow.

It did not mend matters for a score of people to press round, clamorously demanding of each other and of Grace what had happened? — Who had done it? — What was the matter? She could not reply. She had but one thought. She waved them back; and, casting a half-scared, half-appealing look at Lord de Cartarett — who had shown more head

than any one hitherto—but anxious, loving eyes, on Stephen's pallid face, redoubled her endeavors to stanch his wound. It was only when Dr. Cutler had declared that he was only stunned, and was coming to, and the warm motherly arms of Mrs. Coleman had closed around poor trembling Grace, that she did what a young lady of well-regulated mind ought—I believe—to have done long ago—fainted dead away. But as the whole affair did not occupy more than ten minutes, although the events of as many hours seemed to be crowded into them, we may, possibly, be allowed to offer some excuse for her conduct upon the ground that she behaved like a sensible human creature only for a very short space, and then, seeing the error of her way, immediately began to conduct herself like a young lady.

They carried Stephen into the drawing-room, and laid him upon one of the sofas, where Dr. Cutler and his son Jack, the traitor—whom, ignorant of his treason against Francisco, the King, and consequent banishment from the royal favor, Stevie had invited to the party—accepted a bottle of Eau de Cologne and a vinaigrette, out of about thirty-seven similar appliances which Lady Tremlett and her anxious guests provided, and having loosened his neck-tie and collar, set themselves to bringing him round with all the proper formalities.

Another detachment, commanded by Mrs. Coleman, bore Grace towards Lady Tremlett's boudoir; but she came to consciousness on the way, and having begged to be put down, sat herself on the stairs and cried bitterly for some five minutes; she then sprang up, ran away, and could not be found for half an hour, when she was discovered sitting all alone in the dark in an old lumber-room there was at the top of the house.

"My own darling Gracie, are you better?" was Laura's affectionate inquiry as they helped her into the carriage.

"Oh, don't speak to me."

"Why so cross, dear?"

"Cross! Who wouldn't be cross at having made such a fool of one's self. What will he think?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Why, this precious hero of yours, of course! This clumsy idiot, who cannot show his stupid old pictures without dropping the lamp, and tumbling over furniture on his thick head. Bah! I've no patience with him!"

"I am sure he did not *mean* to frighten you, dear," said Mrs. Coleman.

"Then why did he take me into that villainous old musty hall? I was very happy where I was in the drawing-room. Why could not he leave me alone? Awkward imbecile! A captain in the army and not able to hold a lamp! He took too much champagne at supper—that was it. Brute! I'll never speak to him again—never, never! But, oh, dear Mrs. Coleman, what *will* people say? What *will* people say?" And her poor little throbbing head sunk again on the kind matronly bosom, and her indignation was drowned in a flood of tears.

What did he (meaning the "clumsy idiot" aforesaid) think? Why, until he awoke the next morning he had no distinct idea of what had happened to him. He then found his head very heavy and painful; and his forehead very stiff with a trellis-work of diachylum plaster. On the thoughts which were troubling poor Grace he dwelt but little, his mind being engrossed with other and graver considerations as soon as he had collected it sufficiently to think at all. Only when he rose and tried to dress, there fell from his clothes, which had been thrown all in a heap upon a chair at his bedside, one of those pretty scraps of cambric and lace which ladies call a handkerchief, upon which—though soaked through and through with blood—he could decipher the letters, G. L. He could guess whose it was, but little imagined what hand had pressed it to his wound. He smiled that sad sweet smile that we know of; and I should not wonder if it were pressed elsewhere before he locked it up in the secret drawer of his dressing-case.

And what did other people say? They said a good many things that did not accord well with their prayers that night. All sorts of ingenious and charitable conjectures as to the cause of Stevie's accident were indulged in, the most harmless of which, perhaps, was that most in favor with the fair sex of Grace's own age, namely, that Captain Frankland had proposed to her, and that she had been told some dreadful secret about herself. Brothers, cousins, and other intimates of Stevie's standing in the world dissented from this view. Stevie was not the sort of man to faint away at anything a girl could tell him. No, no; it was quite clear what it was. He had tried to snatch a kiss when they were alone together in the old hall, and the strong-minded damsel had knocked him down with the lamp.

Paterfamilias and *madame sa femme* could not, for the most part, be got to ex-

press themselves otherwise than by Burleighian shakes of the head, wise raising of eyebrows, and pursing up of lips. Such things were not to be talked about before the young people, and what passed between those elders within the dread sanctuaries of their bed-curtains is not for me to divulge.

Into good Mrs. Coleman's thoughts we have been accustomed to pry, and therefore may continue the objectionable practice, upon the prevailing principle of continuing doing what is wrong because you have began to do it. This matron's thoughts naturally took a matrimonial direction.

"Ugh!" she exclaimed within herself, as she left poor Grace's room after having seen her disposed of comfortably for the night: "Ugh! it's been her, then, all this time! And the goose has gone and refused him. Who would be pestered with girls and their foibles and fancies? Here's one without a father or mother, or any relation in the world to take care of her, who flings over a young fellow like Stevie, just as though husbands were to be picked off the hedges like blackberries. Ugh! I've no patience with her."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Coleman was very tender and considerate over Grace, and would not allow any one to talk about the affair in the old hall, as she saw that its mention annoyed her. Nor did she recur to it herself except once, when, after having returned from a visit to "The Towers," she drew Grace aside and said —

"You'll be glad to learn, dear, that Stevie is quite well again."

"Indeed! How lucky it was that he fell on his head."

"How so."

"You see, dearest," Grace replied with one of her odd looks, "if he had fallen on anything else he might have hurt himself."

The affair, like most others, had its comical side. Can you imagine the appearance of Mr. Jones, the portly butler, bringing up the rear of the frightened domestics, carrying a huge blunderbuss, gingerly; and looking as if he did not know which to be most frightened at — the robbers who were supposed to be sacking "The Towers," or the unfamiliar instrument of destruction with which he might be called upon to face them? Try and picture also nine yards and a quarter of footmen cut up into lengths averaging some six feet two in length, done up in plush and powder, and exhibiting respectively the extremes of stupidity, stolidity, and fear upon their countenances. Lastly, realize the

coachman — a dumpy and rotund body with a red face and a wig, who had evidently been seeing if anything were left in the decanters as he took them from the dining-room, and who, armed with the kitchen poker, rolled into the middle of the black coats and crinolines, heroically requesting that they would stand aside, and let him (Jehu) get at them (the supposed robbers), for the purpose of warming them. "Let me get at 'em," roared the little man, struggling violently, with one leg through a tarlatan skirt, a lace scarf caught in the stiff curls of his coachman's wig, the round end of his poker jobbed painfully against the third button of a pale young gentleman's waistcoat, and the point, still hot and smoking from the fire, gyrating under Mrs. Coleman's nose; "Let me get at 'em, and I'll warm 'em!" Picture all this, I say, in the midst of a scene which at first was really one of terror, and you will see there was plenty to laugh about when it was known that a broken head and a fainting fit were its worst consequences. The worst consequences I mean, of course, that were known to those who had not heard the apparently simple words — "THE OLD NAME OF TREMLETT TOWERS WAS MANGERTON CHASE," and were ignorant of the disclosure they made.

And how did Mr. Tremlett behave? The reader has discovered that I have taken a dislike to this young gentleman. Most true I have; because I *know him*. Nevertheless, I am not going to do him an injustice. I think the shock of seeing his brother stretched motionless on the ground, with the long crimson lines stealing slowly down his pallid face, struck off a large piece of the husk which vanity and sycophantic worship of small minds had hardened round his heart, and let out some of the emotions which the "dear little delicate Frank" of other days might have felt in a like case. Of course he had not sanctioned the dancing with his presence. If it were not for the fear of offending his mother he would have very soon put a stop to that. It was easy enough to change Lady Tremlett's first impressions when they related to the interests of others, but the idea of a pleasure to herself, once roused, was permanent.

So the dance went on, and Mr. Tremlett took unto himself some half a dozen of his slaves, and led them to an upper room where he kept his books and scientific instruments, and from the window of which he had not been able to get a sufficiently extensive view without cutting

down poor Stevie's memorial tree, and then proceeded to lecture them upon philosophy and the sucking of eggs — to the despair of some of the victims, who being young fellows, would have given one of their eyes to be amongst the dancers.

In the midst of a dreary palaver about order, forces, or some such subject, which might have been interesting if the assembled sages understood what they were talking about, Grace's wild scream rang through the house, and they all rushed pell-mell to see what had happened; and the cause having been ascertained, Francis behaved, as I have said, with much feeling and tenderness to his wounded brother. Just one idea crossed his mind which was not a meritorious one. "Will he die?" thought dear Francis; "and if he does will — will? — but no matter" — and the thought, whatever it was, passed away almost as soon as it was entertained.

The shock of his discovery was a heavy one enough for poor Stevie as it fell. But I do not think that the worst of bad news is its first delivery, however suddenly that delivery may be. At first there is always a chance — a faint one if you like, but still a chance — that you have misunderstood the messenger of evil. That he may be mistaken. That, after all, it may not be quite as bad as it seems. That it may be confuted, combated, neutralized — anything!

Wait till the morning!

Wait till the excitement of the wound has passed away, and nothing remains but the dull aching of the wound. Wait till you have slept upon the calamity, and it comes back gradually and surely — fully and hopelessly, upon your mind. Wait till the waking for the worst — when you know that the days which are to come will be overshadowed by it — when it looms more huge, and black, and crushing, upon the horizon of your life. Wake, I say, in the morning, to find that happiness is never to be known again, save in your dreams; and then bad news is bad indeed.

The bad news which Stephen had heard became worse and worse the more he thought upon it. He had made no inquiries about Mangerton Chase in his own county, because he felt sure it was not there. It was not only in his own county, but in the possession of his own father, at the time when the papers containing the secret were hid! The thought of their hiding-place raised a gleam of hope, which flickered for some moments in his mind. Grace must have been misled. There was no such room as Brandron had described in

Tremlett Towers — in the old part or in the new. Every chamber was familiar to him, except the closed room at the end of the west wing; but then, that was not over an armory. There was no armory; so how could there be a chamber over it? Armor was in the old hall certainly, but then the roof of the hall was the roof of the house. There was no space whatever between.

This hope was bearing his storm-tossed mind into calmer waters, when it suffered sudden shipwreck by remembrances which flocked upon him. He had deemed them of no consequence when they happened; but they assumed a grave import in the light of the discovery that Tremlett Towers had been called Mangerton Chase. His father's unexplained visit to Westborough, his conflicting statements respecting its cause, his desire to have it concealed from his wife, his anxiety to avoid all mention of Brandron, his anger at the mere suggestion of opening that closed chamber, the mysterious hint he had thrown out about there being certain things connected with the Frankland family into which Stephen was not to inquire — had been treated by our hero as so many ciphers representing the negative qualities which, to his sorrow, he knew his parent to possess. But when the great discovery was placed as an unit before them, they represented an awful sum of misery, suspicion, and horror.

"Can it be possible?" moaned poor Stevie, "that my father is a — is —? No — ten thousand times, No! God forgive me for judging him. He is weak, and has been erring enough — may have been compromised by villains and made their scape-goat, but a murderer — the murderer of the man who saved my life! Oh, no! No, no! It is impossible." And his strong loving heart gave way; and he wept like a child.

As soon as he had recovered himself a little he began to think how he should test the truth of Grace's information; and, after consideration, resolved to go and see Bill Grant, the ex head-keeper, and see what he could tell him. In as unconcerned a tone as he could assume he asked if it were true that the old house had been called Mangerton Chase, and the keeper, after some demur, confessed that this was so.

"But don't you let the Squire know that I told you," he said, "or he will be cross. We used always to call it 'The Chase,' you see, and many never knew the other name."

Then Stephen pretended to take a great

interest in the old house, and made Grant describe it. He had not proceeded five minutes before he mentioned the armory.

"Where was that?" asked Stephen quickly.

"Why, they turned it into a laundry, they did — moved all the coats of arms, and such like, into the hall, and —"

"There is a room above it."

"Ah, yes, Sir, there is," replied the old keeper solemnly.

"Have you ever been in it?"

"Only once, when I was a lad and knew nothing about it. I would not go in there again, — no! not for fifty thousand pound."

"Why not?"

"Because it's haunted."

"Haunted! By whom, or what, in the name of wonder?"

"I don't think I ought to tell you, Master Stevie; I don't indeed. It's a family matter, and — and —"

"Therefore one I ought to be acquainted with. Go on, Grant. I *will* know — if not from you, from some one else."

"Well; but I don't half like telling you."

"I'm quite determined to know."

"In that room, Sir," said the keeper in a low voice, "all the heads of your family die. Old John Frankland died there, and his father before him, and his grandfather. And there — mark me, Master Stevie — some day your father will die."

"And I, too, then?"

"I pray God, Master Stevie," said the faithful servant, "that the time may be far off; but when Death, which comes upon us all, comes upon you, he will find you in that room."

Stephen could not help being impressed with the solemn tone in which the paralytic spoke, and the feeling of conviction which marked his words.

"Tell me what you remember of the appearance of the chamber?" he said, after a long and painful pause.

"Well, when I saw it — I mind it well —"

"One moment; was it shut up then?"

"No; your father was the first to shut it up. In old days I've heard tell that the Franklands used to go there to die in their old age — and they mostly lived long lives — and that they passed away there without pain or struggle. There's a tale of Sir Oswald Frankland —"

"I know; he fought in the wars of the Roses."

"Maybe, maybe. Leastwise, he got wounded to death, and made his people carry him up there in his armor, and he

died standing upright with his sword in his hand. But that's only a tale."

"I've heard of it before, but never heard that it took place in any particular room."

"Well, the Squire he didn't like these tales and things; so he had the door bricked up; and quite right too."

"But you saw it when it was open?"

"Ay."

"Then tell me what it was like?"

"It's just shaped like My Lady's room at the other end of the wing."

"And the walls?"

"Well, when I saw them, they was hung with that sort of worsted work, like —"

"You mean tapestry."

"Ay, tapestry. And it was furnished with dark carved oak furniture."

"Of what description?"

"There was a great cabinet."

"Anything else remarkable?"

"Yes; a looking-glass that makes you seem smaller than you are."

"A mirror."

"That's it. Well, then, there was two suits of armor, and a stag's head. It was the last seen hereabouts, and Colonel Gilbert Frankland, your grandfather's brother, shot it; but when he went up to the beast to cut its throat, it gave him a tear in the thigh with its antlers. It was nothing of a wound, but the poison of the horn killed him."

Stephen paid no attention to the concluding sentence. He had heard enough — too much! There was no doubt now. The deserted chamber in Tremlett Towers was the very one described by Brandon on his death-bed; and there, within reach of his hand, lay hid the papers which contained The Secret.



CHAPTER XVII.

MANGERTON CHASE.

THE reader will probably have shared the curiosity of the portress of the convent at Hull, and not only wonder why three visitors should intrude upon the hitherto undisturbed privacy of Sister Mary, in so short a period as one week, but will want to know who they were. The portress was right. There was evidently "something up."

The first visitor was Jim Riley — very much changed, however, as to his outer man from when we last beheld him. The

fur cap, the nasty velveteen shooting-jacket, the fustian smalls and hobnail boots, had disappeared, and were replaced by a suit of black, in which he looked highly respectable, but wofully uncomfortable. I can understand why he should purchase black clothes. He was in mourning for his mother. But why he should have broken out in a satin waistcoat and a tail-coat is one of those mysteries which I have striven in vain to penetrate. My deep but baffled researches convince me that his mother's recent death had little or nothing to do with his choice of those vestments. Black is out and out the worst wearing color we have. The newest black cloth looks shabby in daytime after the least provocation; and yet, go into the streets on Sunday and you will find that all the people who can apparently afford only one suit a year choose it black. The Honorable Reginald Fitz-Shultz, of the Guards, has a suit for every day in the month. When he is tired of them they go to his valet; and yet I'll be bound that not one of them is black. Evening dress I put out of the question. Giles Scroggins, the journeyman carpenter, has one. When at last it has ceased to be his Sunday best it has to be utilized as working apparel; and yet I'll lay my head against that of one of his tenpenny nails, it's *black* — the dingiest, the most rotten color he can get for money!

Would the Honorable Reginald Fitz-Shultz think of wearing a tail-coat in the daytime? The hideous solecism apart, he could not wear a more uncomfortable, useless garment. Still Giles cleaves to it with a desperate affection. He will have his black tail-coat — and very nice indeed he looks — with its useless pockets full of the missuss's little things, and the child's etceteras banging to and fro against his legs, or standing out at any angle but that of beauty, as he takes them to tea with a friend.

And a black satin waistcoat! Has your bricklayer never come for orders in what was once a black satin waistcoat? Do not suppose for an instant that it is the cast-off garment of some other better-to-do person. Visit him at his lodgings in Little Union Street, or elsewhere, next Sunday, and you will find him in his shirt-sleeves smoking his pipe in the window, clad in the successor of that rusty and frayed piece of unserviceable apparel, which, at its best, looks greasy about the seams, and utterly impracticable and worthless after its kind. He has a succession crop of black tail-coats and black satin waistcoats, and his son will

have them after him. There is no hope of change! His wife and his daughter follow the last new fashion set by my Lady Clara Vere de Vere. They have their crinolines, their fancy pockets, their pointed belts, their pork-pie hats, their Balmoral boots, their linsey petticoats, their flyaway, their spoon-shaped, their Mary Stuart bonnets, their seal-skin (imitation) mantles, their dull gold (imitation) solitaires and bracelets, their velvet (cotton) head-dresses, their sleeves, their skirts, their flounces — all made in cheap imitation of My Lady; but no power will get Giles to imitate My Lord. Of the two I think I like Giles the best. I have an impulse towards my hand-kerchief when I see cheap, dirty finery. There is Miss Woolley now, with her hair waxed, and smeared, and twisted into a wonderful network, which endures, innocent of brush, from Sunday to Saturday, and who spends as much money upon tawdry finery as would keep all the family in clean neat prints for a twelvemonth. In her own neighborhood she is considered "quite the lady." I have my suspicions respecting the internal economy of the fair Flora's toilette. It is all very well outside, but — Giles's black satin waistcoat has the merit of disclosing a clean shirt. His tail-coat, objectionable as it is, has been well brushed. There is an odor of yellow soap about the honest fellow, which is reassuring if not fragrant. Yes, I prefer Scroggins as it is, and should like him all the more if he took to wearing good serviceable tweeds and doeskins, made up into comfortable and useful jackets and waistcoats upon the patterns of the Honorable Fitz-Shultz, which would be cheaper in the end, and far more satisfactory throughout, than his unsuitable black satin "vest" and tail-coat.

Here the reader, who has, perhaps, skipped this digression, must be informed that it has not been indulged in without a cause. Have I not said that if I am "wanted" I should dine at Simpson's and take lodgings in Regent Street upon the reasoning before stated? And do you think that I would go about in a fur cap and velveteen shooting-jacket, or a curly brimmed hat, and coach-and-four studs in my shirt, or a light blue frock-coat with a flower in my button-hole, or Hessian boots, a High-Church uniform, or a suit of war paint, to attract everybody's attention? No! I should do as Jim Riley did. Adopt the commonest costume I could think of, and rub elbows with Inspector Lagger in the street without a shade of fear.

How the quondam knife-grinder ob-

tained funds for this metamorphosis need not at present appear. Perhaps he had obtained remunerative employment through the instrumentality of his grandmother at Sheffield,— perhaps he had not.

The second visitor to Sister Mary was a rough-looking sailor-man, who, previous to Jim Riley's advent, had made a tender impression upon one of the kitchen-maids at the convent. He formally announced his intention of "keeping company" with her, and his offer was accepted. Her "Sundays out" were spent with him. They had oyster suppers in the evening, and he never came empty-handed to the *rendezvous*. Ribbons of the most resplendent hue found their way to the caps and dresses of Patty Marsh, in which she timidly scurried out of the convent's back-door to gladden the eyes of her nautical admirer. They had their photographs taken at the sailor-man's expense. Patty's disclosed a libel upon a pretty buxom lass, and the sailor-man's—bar a great black beard—might have passed for a portrait of Mr. Sampson Lagger.

This sailor-man was most curious about all that took place in the convent; and when he heard that a Mr. Brooks had called to see Sister Mary, desired and obtained as correct a description of his person as Patty could give. This obtained, their converse was not so long that evening as usual, the sailor-man having, as he said, sundry important matters connected with his ship to attend to. The next morning Mr. Sampson Lagger in person had an interview with Sister Mary, and the sailor-man having been informed the following Sunday that another gentleman had visited that lady in the mean time, Mr. Sampson Lagger again presented himself at the convent-door. Patty had nothing to do with opening it.

"The answer is," said the portress, when the detective had been announced up-stairs, "that you are to send up your business."

"And what am I to send it up in, my dear?" asked Mr. Lagger.

"My dear" was an old woman of sixty-two.

"You are to tell it to me, and I'll mention it," she replied.

"Well, you've got an uncommon fine head, you have," said the visitor, looking at her with his own on one side and one eye shut; "but I don't think it will hold my business. You can't put a quart of beer in a pint pot, can you now?"

The portress expressed herself as knowing nothing about pints and pots, and Mr. Lagger continued—

"Just you tell the lady I must see her. I won't trouble her long, but I *must* see her."

The reply was, that she had seen him once already,—that she had nothing further to tell him, and therefore positively declined to give him another interview.

"Very good," said Mr. Lagger; "now I know what to do. I don't want to run rusty with ladies, but must is must. You take this 'ere card to the Principal, and you say just this: 'Mr. Lagger, a detective officer from London, is below, and he wants to see Sister Mary alone for ten minutes; Sister Mary won't see him, and all he wishes to know is this,—is he to telegraph to the gentleman who lives on the first floor with the green cloth curtains in Jermyn Street, London, Middlesex, or is he not? — *that's* what he wants to know!'"

The reply this time was, that he was to please to walk up-stairs; Sister Mary would come in a few minutes.

What passed between them is best told by its results.

"Not know where Master Jim's got to! Well; perhaps she don't. Not know why Captain Frankland wants to find out where Mangerton Chase is! Well; perhaps she don't agin. But what brings the Captain to her, and what's Mangerton Chase to him? That's the question just now for you, my man (addressing himself as usual). That's about what *you* have got to find out. The Captain knows a precious deal more than he'd tell at the inquest. He's got private information of his own — that's what *he's* got! He's on the track, that's sartain. Hang me if I don't follow him where he goes, and see what he does. I'll keep my eyes on him. May be we'd come up to the clue together. If we do, there'll be a fair race for it, Sampson Lagger; and if you're the man I takes you for, somebody else will have to be second at the finish."

So he took himself off back again from whence he came, and poor Patty never set eyes on her sailor-man again. Arrived in the metropolis, he had an interview with a person in authority at Scotland Yard, and, having paid a flying visit to Little Union Street, took the train the same night for Durmstone.

A wonderful man for making acquaintances was Mr. Sampson Lagger. Jones, the Jupiter Tonans of the below-stairs Parnassus of Tremlett Towers, was not the sort of person to be easily picked up by a stranger. His air was dignified, his words were few, he stood stiffly to his dig-

nity, and resented the slightest approach to familiarity. Nevertheless, Mr. Lagger picked him up, and was high in his favor before a week was out. Vanity was the soft spot in Mr. Jones's character, and into this the detective struck his hook and led him about like a sheep. Vanity was the tap of Mr. Jones's breast, and into this the detective fitted his pump and pumped it dry.

Their intimacy began at a pigeon-shooting match which was held in the neighborhood. A dispute arose, and some one having appealed to Mr. Lagger, he replied angrily —

“Don’t you appeal to me. You appeal to some one as knows more than me ; and I see a gentleman here as knows more than me, and more than you and all the rest of the company put together. He’s a gentleman of judgment and discrimination — that’s what he is. *I’ve* heard of him, and bless me if I should like to be a pigeon when *he*’s shooting a match.”

Having attracted general attention by his loud voice and gestures, the company requested to be informed who this paragon could be, and fifteen small farmers began to look sheepish in anticipation of their being introduced as the Admirable Crichton in question.

“Who is he ?” retorted Mr. Lagger. “Why, I am surprised at you ! Who has lived and spent all his life amongst gentlemen as know about these sort of things ? Who is here that is in the confidence of half the squires in the county ? Who has come down to this ‘ere little game a purpose to give a sanction to the pro-ceedings ? I’m a stranger hereabouts — I am ; but I’m not such a born fool as not to know an upright and talented referee when I see one.”

The upshot was that he indicated Mr. Jones as the subject of his eulogy, and won that person’s heart, inside and out. Such good friends did they become, that Mr. Lagger was invited to “The Towers,” was shown all over the house in the temporary absence of the family, and regaled afterwards in the butler’s sanctum with some rare port and cigars, to which the guests of “dear Francis” and My Lady were not often treated. Then Mr. Jones proceeded to pump his visitor as to what business brought him to Durmstone ; and Mr. Lagger would wink, place his finger on the side of his nose most significantly, and throw out mysterious hints about new railways — bill before Parliament — land-owners — rival company — secret information — confidential service — and the

like. Upon which Mr. Jones would wink his eye, lay his finger on the side of his nose, most significantly of nothing, and make belief that he understood all about it, and was not the man to divulge the important secrets which had been confided to him. Many an evening did the detective pass in the butler’s sanctum and the wider circle of the housekeeper’s room. Mrs. Cooper declared she had never met a more agreeable gentleman ; and Mr. Markleby, who was “gentleman” to “dear Francis,” was hurled into the depths of despair by the flirtation which was instituted between this welcome guest and Mrs. Patten, My Lady’s lady’s-maid.

Nor was Mr. Lagger the only visitor in those regions. The servants’ hall of Tremlett Towers was filled with strange liversies ; the more extensive apartments devoted to upper servants were full of strange Ladies’ ladies and Gentlemen’s gentlemen. The expected guests had arrived, and the partridges and hares were having a bad time of it. Not such a bad time as they might have had if our Stevie had been in the field. Nothing, however, would induce him to join the party. It was a small sort of revenge to take, and was, I think, unworthy of him. Your very sensitive people often make geese of themselves in this way, and think that they are punishing others when they are only vexing themselves.

He had made an inward vow that he would never draw trigger again upon his mother’s land, and even if that harrowing disclosure had not been made and absorbed every other thought than the wretched fears and fancies it engendered, he would have kept his word. As it was, he had a good excuse for keeping aloof from the new comers, — none of whom, with one exception, he knew or cared for. His head, he said, was still very painful, and his face was so stuck about with plasters that it was not fit to be seen.

So he kept his room, sitting within a few yards of where the secret was hidden, fretting his heart out, not daring to make a bold stroke and know the worst at once. Have you ever received a letter which you hope may contain news of some great pleasure or advantage, or fear may bring home to you some great loss or grief ; and have you always had the courage at once to break the seal ? Have you ever had a question trembling on your lips which you would give the world to have answered, but dared not ask ? Do you know what it is to have received a wound which you have not nerve enough to look at ? If you

do, you can tell why Stephen Franklin procrastinated and shuddered at the thought that sooner or later he must raise the veil which covered severe humiliation and grief.

The only one amongst the guests whom he could see came up more than once and sat with him, chatting about old times and his Indian experiences. This was Percy Coryton's uncle, the Earl of Rossthorne, a very old friend of Sir George Tremlett's. "Dearest Francis" was glad enough to welcome his father's friends when they were earls!

Lord Rossthorne was a nobleman of what is called the "old school," — courteous with women, quiet with men, dignified and cold with all. He was not in the habit of ordering people about in a brutal tone, by way of impressing you with his dignity and power — after the manner of some youthful heads of noble houses; nor was he given to patronizing. The servant who attended him for orders, and the acquaintance who answered his finesse with the knave of hearts at the whist-table, were listened to with the same placid smile, and received their reply in the same soft measured voice. He was more than sixty years of age, tall, and more erect and hearty than many a dandy of twenty-two. So striking was his appearance, with his bright eagle-like eye, snow white hair, and quick firm tread, that no one could pass him in the street without remarking what a fine handsome man he was. Old you could hardly call him, for every movement of his body, every expression of his countenance, evinced firmness, strength, and — to a keen observer — an indomitable will. There are whispers about that in his youth he had sown a goodly crop of wild oats, and those cereals were of luxuriant growth in the year 1819. Even then, however, I do not think that he brought harlots to brush skirts with his sisters at the Opera, or lent his hunters to notorious courtesans and patronized them at the meet, or chatted with them openly in the public promenade. Shocking things these to think of, no doubt; but as good society does not cut rich young noblemen for *doing* them, it can scarcely be angry with a poor young author for suggesting that they are done.

Sir George Tremlett became acquainted with Lord Rossthorne during his memorable visit to young Harcourt in the days when George the Fourth became king. Young Harcourt was now a needy man, living as he could at foreign watering-places; and, notwithstanding the influence which he had inherited — there was little

else to come — from his popular father, and to which, as we know, Stevie was indebted for his commission, he might have starved in his old age, but for the assistance which the noble companion of his better days generously and delicately afforded. Many such acts are recorded in favor of the cold and proud Lord Rossthorne. He had been a widower for upwards of forty years, and had neither kith nor kin — with the sole exception of Percy Coryton, his sister's son, and heir to his title and estates.

The next in rank of the visitors was the Honorable and Reverend Theophilus Corbyle, one of Mr. Tremlett's "set" at Oxford, and his bride, a lady of imposing stature and extreme High Church views, who lost no opportunity, "as a clergyman's wife," of putting everybody and everything to rights, after having picked everybody and everything to pieces as a preliminary.

Then there were Professor Spraggle and his lady — also from Oxford. Three youthful county magistrates, a cousin of the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyle, and one Colonel Vincent Champneys — of whom anon — who with Lord Rossthorne formed the shooting party.

Colonel Vincent Champneys was a new acquaintance of Francis Tremlett, and a distant connection of the Archdeacon of the diocese, who had introduced him at "The Towers." It was not altogether clear from whom this gentleman had received his commission as Colonel. He never was in the regular army, militia, or volunteers, but had seen much service in many irregulars all over the world. He had served in Spain, had been a General in the army of Nicaragua, had worn the white uniform of Austria, commanded Turkish troops in the Crimean war and was fresh from Garibaldi's glorious campaign, when he arrived at Tremlett Towers. In appearance he was a bronzed veteran on the wrong side of fifty-six. In manner he was loud, active, and rather assuming. He could converse fluently in half a dozen languages, knew something of everything, was the best billiard-player in the house, and the only antagonist worthy of playing, after Lord Rossthorne, at whist. He soon became upon excellent terms with most of the party, including the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyle, who, "as a clergyman's wife," made his roving life the subject of sundry sermons, to which he listened devoutly. The Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyle was a sort of "dear Francis" in petticoats, and greatly

infringed upon that potentate's prerogatives. Lady Tremlett was delighted with the Colonel. So droll, so entertaining, so good-humored, was the Colonel.

"Hope you had a better night's rest, Professor," said Sir George to Mr. Spraggle upon the second morning of his visit.

"I cannot conscientiously say that I had, Sir George," was the reply; "Mrs. Spraggle's ears are very quick — remarkably quick! She asseverates that she heard that noise again distinctly; and when Mrs. Spraggle hears a noise in bed, *I never have a good night's rest*," said the little Professor, with the air of a man who had solved a problem which entitled him to the gratitude of mankind.

"It must have been the wind," observed Sir George.

"Wind, my dear Sir George, or atmospheric air in a state of agitation, is an impalpable body, incapable, of itself, to produce any sound; and I am not aware of any body acting upon which the noises described by Mrs. Spraggle could be produced."

"What were they like?"

"Here she is to answer for herself. My love, our worthy host requests to know what description you can give of the sounds which have disturbed your — ahem! our rest, for the last two nights."

"Oh, my dear Sir George," replied that lady, who was celebrated for her nerves, "they were dreadful; like somebody sharpening a chisel on the hearthstone."

"Well, well, my dear Madam, we will change your room. You shall not be disturbed again. I think I know what it was. There is a large tree which grows close to the house, near your window, and its branches rubbing against the wall might perhaps produce the sounds which annoyed you. We will put you in the other wing."

"It was *not* the branches of a tree rubbing against the wall, Spraggle," this lady declared when they were alone; "it was somebody scraping something gritty with something hard and sharp. I cannot be mistaken, my nervous organization is so very acute. What business have people to be sharpening chisels all night long in a gentleman's house. It's disgraceful!"

"And so we shan't see any more of you, Mr. Lagger?" said Jones, the butler, to his guest that evening, as he held open the back door for his departure.

"No," replied Mr. Lagger, seriously;

"all that's bright must fade, and I must get back to London town. I've bin among a many pleasant people in my time," he continued, addressing the yard pump, "but never among any who come up to this little lot here; they're regular out-and-out fizzers — that's what *they* are."

Presently, sober Mrs. Cooper and pert Mrs. Patten, and one or two other of the Ladies' ladies, came out to shake hands with their pleasant visitor under the summer stars, and wish him good-by and a pleasant journey on the morrow. And so he left, to the great regret of all the fair sex and the satisfaction of Mr. Markleby. He really was a jolly fellow, and a gallant one in his rough way, was Sampson Lagger, being just a servants' hall edition of the popular Colonel Vincent Champneys.

The nearest way to Durmstone was to cross the lawn and pass through a wicket in the iron fence which separated it from the park, into a foot-path which led direct to the church. Mr. Lagger paused at this wicket, and indulged in one of his usual soliloquies, addressed indifferently to himself and the moon.

"You've been down here," he mused, "pretty nigh a fortnight, and what have you done beside standing on your head in that there servants' hall? Why, you ain't done much. How could you? You came down here — very properly — to watch the Captain, to go where he went, see who he saw, and find out what his little game was; because you thought that *his* little game was *your* little game. You stays here pretty nigh a fortnight, and you comes to the conclusion that he ain't got no little game at all! It was a rum start, too, his going all the way to that old woman at Hull to find out what his own father's house used to be called before he was born. It was rum, too, that the Bart. should get that there letter and be off to London in such a hurry the day before the murder; but then — Holloa! what's that?"

Well might the detective exclaim "What's that?" Straight in front of him, not fifty yards off, an upper window was opened, and a man bearing a lantern and a knotted rope passed out, and seizing hold of a water-pipe which ran down the wall close at hand, swung himself on to the parapet above. Then he passed on to the end of the wing, and having hooked something which was at one end of his rope to the coping stones, lowered himself through the branches of the old poplar on to the roof of the oriel window. This gained, he jerked his rope free, and fasten-

ing it again as before, descended by it till he remained half standing on the windowsill, half swinging by the rope. With the hand that was at liberty he next broke and removed one of the small diamond-shaped panes of glass, and opened the window from within. In another moment he had sprung into the chamber.

"Blazes!" exclaimed Mr. Lagger, who had dodged behind a bed of laurustinus when first he saw the light. "Blazes! here's a pretty go! That chap ain't up to no good, and it's your dooty, Inspector Lagger, to see what he's up to—that's about what *your* dooty is."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RAT!—A RAT!

WHEN Professor Spraggle retired to rest the second night after his arrival at Tremlett Towers, he found his better half sitting up in bed—her fair person describing the most correct of right angles—with sternness upon her features and a watch in her hand. Every one of the numerous curl-papers which decorated her classic brow, appeared as though it had screwed itself up extra tight for the occasion, and each particular frill of the severely-starched garment which her position displayed, seemed to stand on end with terror, as the learned man stole mildly into the apartment. He was a mighty Don in his University; an object of awe to quaking Undergraduates in "the Schools;" a very lion as he paced "the High" in full Professorial costume; but the gentlest of ewe lambs in the presence of his wife, especially when that authority had assumed her diadem of curl-papers, and sat in awful state, enthroned between the bed-curtains. There was then no hope for him until the morning. He knew that she was shaking her head at him as he entered, for he heard the curl-papers rustling together. They seemed to be ringing a muffled peal in memory of his hope for a night's rest, which had then departed.

"Spraggle," said the lady, in a severe tone; "it is a quarter to one o'clock."

"Is it really, my love? I did not think it could be so late."

"Think!" retorted the injured fair one.

"What business have you to think? You know that you are allowed twenty minutes

when I retire, and I told you that it was twelve o'clock as I left the room. You've been drinking soda-water, Spraggle, with those young men."

The Professor eagerly repudiated any participation in so wild an orgie.

"I assure you, my dear," he said, "that you are mistaken. I have touched nothing since you left. The fact is, that I got into a very interesting conversation with Mr. Tremlett, respecting Pre-Adamite literature, and —"

"Pre-Adamite fiddle-stick's end!" interrupted his lady. "What do you know about Adam more than you hear in church, or Mr. Tremlett either?"

"But you must know, my dear, that a very learned Russian —"

"Don't talk to me, Sir, about your Russians, or your Prussians either," exclaimed Mrs. Spraggle. "If they teach you to keep your lawful wife awake all night, destroying her health in this way, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. I've no patience with people who pretend to know more than their betters. Pre-Adamite literature indeed! Why you will be wanting to persuade me next that Abel kept a circulating library, and that Noah had a printing-press in the Ark."

"The Professor assumed a dignified air, and replied, "I would have you to know, Madam, that —"

"Spraggle! Spraggle!! If you go on talking in this incessant manner, — if you do not get into bed without one other word, you will put my poor nerves into such a state, that I shall not get a wink of sleep all night."

This was enough. In three minutes the Professor had assumed an horizontal position parallel to his better half, and at the farthest possible distance from her pillow. He had just resigned himself to descending slumbers, when his spouse sprang up into her former angular position, with the agility of a "Jack-in-the-box."

"Spraggle!"

"My love?"

"This is not such a good room as the one we had last night."

"No, my dear," replied the Professor. "Perhaps not; but then, you know, it's very quiet."

"I am not so sure of that. I heard a noise just before you came in."

"It was somebody going to bed."

"Do you believe it was a tree scraping against the wall, that made the noise last night?"

"Of course it was, my dear. Did not Sir George say so?"

"Then why did he not have the tree cut down?" demanded the lady.

"Cut down, my love?"

"Yes; cut down! Don't repeat my words, Mr. Spraggle, like that."

"Because, my life, he thought it would be best to change us into another room," pleaded her husband, mildly.

"I will not be changed about into different rooms every night, Mr. Spraggle, for you or anybody. My father was a Bishop, and I'm not going to be made nothing of. It's just like your mean-spirited ways to want it."

"My dear," expostulated the poor Professor, "did I say I wanted it?"

"I don't care whether you do, or whether you don't," replied his wife, making a hurricane of her curl-papers. "All I say is this,—if people are allowed to go about the house, sharpening chisels to-night, I shall pack up my things and leave to-morrow. I will not endure it. There!" and the curl-papers rang out another peal, as the offended lady flopped back again upon her couch.

Half an hour afterwards, when the Professor was in his first sleep, dreaming of a lecture he was about to give upon his return to Oxford, respecting the use of the Digamma, Mrs. Spraggle again became suddenly rectangular.

"Spraggle!"

"Oh dear! oh dear! What is it my love?"

"There's a noise."

Spraggle groaned.

"Don't presume to groan at me like that, Mr. Spraggle, for I'll not endure it!" exclaimed his better half. "I say, I believe there is a noise."

"Then you are not quite certain, my love?" said the Professor, greatly relieved by the doubt expressed.

"No!" she replied, after a pause. "I can say, conscientiously, that I am *not* quite certain. You may go to sleep again, Spraggle; and if I hear anything I will be sure to wake you."

"Thank you, my dear," said her husband, and again he lapsed into Dreamland, but only to be violently torn once more from its charms. He was dreaming that his great treatise, in fourteen volumes, on the Greek particles, had been given to a discerning public, and that he had been elected Dean of Christ Church by acclamation, but that some one insisted upon pulling his academical gown off his shoulders, just as he was going to be installed. He awoke, and found that it was his wife who was shaking him.

"Whatever may be your conduct towards me, Spraggle," said the lady, as soon as she had thoroughly aroused him, "I shall always be fair and candid towards you. I am not obstinate, like some people I could mention, and do not mind acknowledging myself to be in error. I find that I was mistaken when I woke you and said that there was a noise."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, my dear," said the Professor.

"Of course you are!" retorted his spouse; "of course you are glad to find something which you can throw in my teeth hereafter. I dare say I shall never hear the end of the admission which my truthful nature compels me to make; but I am not going to tell a lie for you, Spraggle, or any one else!"

"Of course not, my love. I ——"

"Will you let me speak! I was saying, when you interrupted me, that I am determined to tell the truth come what may; and the truth is, that I have not been able to hear *any* noise. I have listened attentively for the last three quarters of an hour, and I can conscientiously affirm that the house is quite quiet. Therefore pray let me go to sleep, Mr. Spraggle, if you do not wish to have me quite ill from want of rest."

So the Professor slept the sleep of the blessed at last.

Nevertheless, the house was *not* quite quiet all that night; though the fact of there being a slight break in the silence cannot be taken to disparage Mrs. Spraggle's highly sensitive acoustic powers, when we consider the distance which separated her from the scene of the disturbance. One of Mr. Tremlett's university friends, — a stout young gentleman with white eyelashes and pink hands, who had asserted his ability to sleep anywhere, — had been transferred into the chamber originally occupied by the Professor and his wife; and some chaff was indulged in at the expense of the learned man, when Colonel Vincent and one or two of the least serious of the visitors assembled the next morning in the breakfast-room.

"Well, Mr. Roundley," said the Colonel, when the stout young gentleman made his appearance; "did the ghost come and sharpen chisels in your room last night?"

"Well, not exactly."

"What do you mean by 'Not exactly?' How did you sleep?"

"Pretty well."

"Is that all? We all thought, from your own account, that you were a lineal

descendant of the Seven Sleepers, and that nothing would disturb you."

"Oh, I sleep very soundly as a general rule," replied Roundleby; "only you see when a man *expects* to hear anything, he gets fidgety, and that keeps him awake."

"Did you hear anything, then?" asked his intimate friend, Mr. Octavius Flounder, a profound metaphysician of twenty, and one of "dear Francis's" most ardent admirers.

"Well, I think,—I may say I am sure,—quite sure I did."

"What was it?" asked the Colonel, quickly.

"Just such a noise as Mrs. Spraggle described,—a grating, scraping sound, as though somebody were at work with a chisel."

"But did you not hear how Sir George accounted for it?" asked Mr. Flounder. "The boughs of the tree that grows outside, by the window, scrape against the wall when swayed by the wind."

"When swayed by the wind, perhaps, they do," said Roundleby; "but there was no wind last night,—not a breath."

"It was certainly very sultry," mused the metaphysician; "but are you quite sure, my dear Augustus, that you were not misled by fancy? The human mind, in reflecting impressions conveyed by what we vulgarly call our 'senses,' frequently——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted his friend, who apparently was prepared for what was coming. "I dare say it was all fancy,—that an ideal something was, by an effort of the imagination, supposed to be rubbed against an ideal something else, and that the result was a purely ideal noise. Nevertheless, it was such a noise as no one could help hearing."

"From whence did it proceed?"

"From the end of the passage."

"Where all that old tapestry hangs?"

"Exactly."

"Why did you not get up and see what was making it?"

"Oh, it was no business of mine."

"I should think anything that kept me awake all night a business of mine," replied the metaphysician.

"What! if it were only an idea? But your usually logical mind has taken a jump, my dear Flounder. The noise,—whatever it was,—did not keep me awake all night. It lasted at the utmost for about half an hour, and was not continuous. It may have begun again, though, after I had fallen asleep."

"I think I can explain the mystery," observed Colonel Vincent, who had been

listening to the foregoing conversation. "The sound you describe is very like that which would be made by a rat gnawing through the oak wainscoting."

"But, my dear Colonel," replied Roundleby, "a rat would not take two nights to eat his way through a board, and he would hardly masticate that hard old wood for amusement."

"For amusement, No,—from necessity, taught by instinct, Yes," said the Colonel. "Are you not aware that the incisor teeth of the rat grow so fast that it is *obliged* to gnaw to keep them down. Take my word for it now, that you were disturbed by a rat, and don't notice the noise when you hear it again. You can do no good by getting up and driving it away. The rascal will come back to his work when all is silent again, and I dare say,—ah, here comes Sir George, he will tell us. Are you troubled with rats here, Sir George?"

"Rats!" exclaimed the Baronet, as he came fussing, as usual, into the room; "I should think so. We have got some of the most ancient families of rats in the country. They breed amongst the hollow floors of the old house, and I am sorry to say that they have overrun the whole building."

"You should have a grand *battue* some day. We had one at Keystone Castle last month, and it was capital fun," said the Colonel.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Sir George; "a capital thought! So we will,—so we will—we'll have a grand *battue*, and you shall manage it,—will you?"

"By all means. You have only to order the keepers to bring their ferrets, and a few sharp terriers; and I dare say,"—the Colonel continued, turning to Roundleby, "that we shall polish off your enemy amongst the rest."

"Enemy!—enemy!—what enemy?" inquired Sir George, looking from one to the other.

"Colonel Vincent thinks that it is a rat which makes that noise in the passage close to my room," replied Roundleby. "By all means begin your *battue* there."

"There!" exclaimed the Baronet; "No, No, No; that would never do. There are no rats about that passage."

"Not behind the tapestry under the skirting boards?" replied the Colonel. "I should have thought *that* the very best place to look for them."

"But pray don't; you are quite mistaken," said Sir George, becoming suddenly flushed and excited. "I,—I must ask you, really as a favor, not to,—not to

move the tapestry. It, — it, — is very old, and, — and, — fragile, and I will, — I say I value it highly, and, — and there is a great deal of dust accumulated behind, — don't you see. So pray do not touch it. Now, will you promise me, — will you gentlemen promise me, — not to touch this very old, and ha, — ha, — ha, — very dusty tapestry? Because you see," continued their host without waiting for a reply; "it would be no use doing so, — only make a mess, — as all the rats are in the new part of the house, — every one."

"Well," said Colonel Vincent; "we can begin the slaughter there."

"I think," replied the Baronet, after a pause, "that it would be hardly worth while; we have trapped so many lately that there are not more than one or two of the creatures about. Now, if you were to go to the granary in the farm-yard, you would find excellent sport."

"Sport!" exclaimed Colonel Vincent; "my dear Sir George, you do not suppose I consider ratting 'sport'? I only suggested it as a means of abating a nuisance, for I certainly understood you to say that your house, and especially the older part of it, was infested with those vermin; but, of course, you know best, and I may be mistaken."

"Oh, quite so — quite so — quite so. Ah! here are the ladies," and the Baronet hearing the distant rustle of silk, fussed away into the hall, received his fair guests, and passed back with them into the breakfast-room.

"And so we really were successful in finding you a comfortable room, my dear Mrs. Spraggle? I am so glad! You were not disturbed again?"

"No, Sir George, I am happy to say that I was not," replied the lady. "It was very good of you to prevent the recurrence of that odious noise."

"And yet," replied the Baronet, "here is a gentleman who fancies that he heard it."

"Who is he?" demanded Mrs. Spraggle, severely. "Show him to me. Let him step forward."

Roundleby was indicated as the pretender, and confronted — looking very sheepish — with the indignant lady.

"Mr. Spraggle," she said to her husband, who had just entered the room, "be so good as to inform this gentleman whether I did, or whether I did not, make a communication to you last night, with regard to the house being, or not being, perfectly quiet."

"You certainly made several observa-

tions on the subject, my love," replied the Professor.

"And what was the opinion, Mr. Spraggle, that, after careful consideration, I arrived at?"

"That the house was quiet — quite quiet, my dear."

"I believe that, after having expressed myself to that effect, I went to sleep."

"You did, my love."

"We have been married, if I am not incorrect, Mr. Spraggle, for eleven years?"

"We have, my dear," replied the Professor, with a sigh.

"From observation of my nervous system during that time, do you think it possible that I could have slumbered, had there been a noise in the house?"

"Certainly not, my love!" replied the Professor, emphatically.

"Then I think that the gentleman had better not make himself ridiculous by repeating a statement which cannot have any foundation in fact," observed the lady, gazing sternly at the wall, about two yards over Roundleby's head. "I never was so insulted in my life," she observed, afterwards; "a mere Bachelor of Arts to tell me that he heard noises whilst I was asleep! Let him take care what he is about, or either he or I will have to leave the house!"

It was on this same morning that Stephen Frankland made his first appearance in public, since his accident; and was introduced to his brother's guests, to all of whom — as I have already said — he considered himself to be a stranger. When, however, he was presented to Colonel Vincent, a bright flush suffused his pale face, and instead of frankly shaking his hand, as he had done with Roundleby and the others, the grave young soldier assumed his gravest manner, and passed this new acquaintance with a distant bow. The gay Colonel was rather taken aback by this sudden change in the demeanor of the eldest son of the house, but he was too much, a man of the world to show his vexation; he only bit his lip and said nothing. Nor was Stephen's apparent rudeness noticed by the other visitors, for Lady Tremlett entered the room at the moment, and engrossed the general attention.

She had been greatly affected, as we know, by Stephen's misfortune when it happened; but had forgotten all about it by luncheon-time the next day. She had even gone so far as to declare to Lord Rossthorne that it was very unkind indeed of "dear Stevie" to stay up in his room, and not help to entertain the company. If he was well enough, she complained, to

go out and visit a dreadful old gamekeeper, surely he was not too much hurt to make himself agreeable to the charming people who were all so fond of "dear Francis." The idea of visiting him, and seeing for herself how he actually was, never had occurred to her. She had sent her maid to inquire, and the answer was that he had gone out. It was subsequently reported that he had been seen by one of the stable-boys, coming out of Grant's cottage. Hence My Lady's complaint. But when he kissed her in his old affectionate manner, and she saw what a change those few days had made in him, she forgot all her grievances. She flung her arms round his neck; she parted aside the crisp brown locks which hid the wound upon his forehead, with her pretty jewelled fingers; she kissed the strip of black plaister which covered the scar, and cried over it, before all the guests. "Oh, how pale he was! Oh, how haggard he looked! Oh, what a strange expression he had in his eyes! She was sure he was very ill! He had broken something dreadful in his brain; William must ride over, directly, to Derby, for Dr. Cutler. William must telegraph immediately to London for Dr. Locock, and that other clever doctor that the newspapers praised so much — what was his name?" Somebody tells her his name. "Oh, it was Holloway, Professor Holloway." How wicked it was of her — Lady Tremlett — not to have sent for the doctors before. The dear fellow! Did anybody know what to do for him? She was sure he had dislocated his brain! Ought he to be bled, or take a Seidlitz powder, or be trepanned, or what? She was confident that he would die if they did not do something immediately!" Thus she ran on.

This was just the sort of thing that would have worried Stevie, beyond measure, at any other time; but now he was not sorry to use the bodily suffering under which he was presumed to labor, as a veil to hide the effects of that mental agony which, in truth, had blanched his cheeks, and ploughed furrows on his brow. He assured Lady Tremlett, in as playful a tone as he could assume, that he was getting quite well again, and that there was not the least cause for her anxiety; but did not object to Dr. Cutler being sent for. He had no heart for society, and gladly seized the excuse which would be accorded to him, as an invalid, of remaining in his own room, when, and as long as he pleased.

And there, at the foot of the breakfast-table, very possibly in the same chair in

which he had sat only a few weeks before, with that ugly scrawl burning in his pocket — laughing, chattering, making silly old jokes, paying absurd compliments right and left, as though he had not a care, or a regret to cast a shadow on his life — sat Sir George Tremlett. When, the meal being concluded, he laid his hand upon his elder son's shoulder, and with real earnestness, begged him to take medical advice, an involuntary shudder ran through Stevie's veins, and he could not help shrinking from the touch. In a moment it had passed away, and beckoning his father into one of the bay windows, he said —

"I want to have just a word or two with you, Sir, if you have time."

"Certainly, my dear boy, certainly. What is it?"

"Where did you pick up this Colonel Vincent?"

"He was introduced to me by the Archdeacon; he is a connection of his wife."

"Do you happen to know what he is?"

"Oh, he has been in the army — all over the world. Been everywhere. A very superior man, I assure you."

"Humph!" said Stevie. "Now, pray don't let this go farther, for I may be mistaken. I think I have heard of him in India."

"Oh yes, he has been in India."

"When?"

"Ah; that I cannot say; but you can ask him."

"Scarcely; for if he be the man I take him to be, he was expelled the club at Simla for cheating at cards."

"Impossible!"

"I do not say *positively* that he is the same. The man I mean, who never was in our army or the Queen's; but who held some command in the service of one of the Amirs of Scinde, and who rendered himself infamous from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, by his conduct to his wife, was pointed out to me once at Barrackpore, and if that *soi disant* Colonel Vincent is not your Colonel Vincent, then all I can say is, that your friend labors under a most unfortunate similarity of name and appearance with about the greatest blackguard that ever trod the earth."

"Really, really, my dear Stevie," exclaimed the Baronet, "you are going too far. The idea! It is really too bad of you to make such charges! A friend of ours — a gentleman who visits all over the country; a relation of the Archdeacon's; an officer — —"

"Pardon me!" interrupted Stevie. "There you beg the question. I say he

is *not* an officer. Ask him, casually, in what regiment he has served, and show me his name in the Army List — you have a whole collection of them, I know, somewhere — and I withdraw all I have said, and ask your pardon for having cast wrongful aspersions on your guest. Only be careful, for if I *should* happen to be right, you have no minor villain to deal with."

Lord Rossthorne did not come down to breakfast this morning. The night before, he paid Stevie a visit in his room, and sat some time with him, chatting over old times, and in the course of conversation, had then complained that he felt his old enemy — the rheumatism — creeping over him.

"He's tracing out his works, my boy," said the courteous old nobleman. "I got my feet wet in those splendid turnip-fields of yours, out shooting to-day, and he has proclaimed war in consequence. I must try if I cannot raise the siege by a *coup de main*, or, at any rate, make terms of truce; so if you do not see me to-morrow morning, make my excuses to Lady Tremlett, and tell her that, if we old fellows will be boys, we must take the consequences."

The shooting party, therefore, was deprived of its best shot.

As its various members are waiting for the dog-cart, which was to take them on their way, Colonel Vincent drew Roundley aside, and observed —

"This eldest son seems a morose sort of individual. How did he get that blow on the head which he makes such a fuss about?"

"Tremlett tells me that he tripped up over some girl's dress, at a party they had some nights before we came, and tumbled against something."

"Was he screwed, then?"

"I dare say he was," replied Roundley. "These Indian officers are awful rips — some of them."

"Is he in the Indian army?" asked the Colonel, quickly.

"So I am told."

"Of what Presidency?"

"I don't know; but here comes his brother, he will know. Oh, Mr. Tremlett, tell us what Presidency does Captain Frankland belong to?"

"Bengal."

"May I ask in what regiment?" inquired Colonel Vincent.

"Theth Light Cavalry — but look! look! Colonel. You have dropped your cigar amongst the powder-flasks."

"I — no — have I? Well, it does not

matter, it is out," said Vincent, in rather a confused tone and manner.

"I beg your pardon," replied our methodical Francis; "I can see it smoking. Why, the end is quite red hot."

"So it is! Very strange! I thought it was out." And Colonel Vincent placed it again between his lips, and having blown out a dense cloud of smoke, took up his gun, and sauntered away towards the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

THE Italian style of architecture so admirably adapted by Messrs. Rubble and Square, to enlarge the ancient Elizabethan mansion, once known as Mangerton Chase, had been followed in the erection of Ruxton Court. Mrs. Coleman had her weaknesses, and one of them was to follow the lead of "The great house."

Her own particular room was situated in a sort of gazebo, from which an extensive view of the surrounding country, and especially of the drive which led up to her hall-door, could be obtained. There — having duly performed her onerous domestic duties — she sat on the watch, like the warders of old, not for the purpose of warning her stronghold into a state of defence, upon the approach of any enemy that might appear in array before it, with the view of taking it by storm and carrying off its treasures; but that she might be able to have a graceful reception prepared for the foe, and exhibit those treasures to him in their most attractive form, with a view to their being carried off as speedily as possible. By all which I mean to say, that the good lady took care that her "gals" should never be taken at a disadvantage by a possible suitor. On the contrary, that they should be discovered, on all occasions, attired in the most charming toilettes, and engaged in the most elegant pursuits. About a quarter of a mile from the house was an iron gate through which every visitor had to pass, and which, swinging to and fro till it finally closed, made a loud clicking noise that served as a preliminary signal. This heard, the "gals" would be ordered into the drawing-room, and when the coming man was announced, he would find Laura at the piano, in the paroxysms of some well-studied fantasia; and the beautiful

Emily seated by the window, giving the finishing touches to wonderful water-color paintings, kept expressly for the purpose; whilst the mother would feign astonishment at the arrival, and heartily welcoming the guest, would apologize for the girls being found at their work.

In the days when Stevie was supposed to have a *tendresse* for Miss Coleman, he was once welcomed in this fashion; but the scheme received its death-blow, as far as he was concerned, by revelations made by her truthful but indiscreet brother Bobby; who, having rushed into the drawing-room at the moment when Mrs. Coleman was explaining that Laura had just been trying over some new music, exclaimed —

“ Oh, Ma, what a crammer! Why, she learnt it last winter!”

It was no use trying to frown the urchin into silence, or to tell him he was mistaken. This made matters worse.

“ I tell you she *did*, Ma. She began in the middle just as Captain Stevie passed the window. Didn’t you, Laura? You always do. And Emmy — now, Captain Stevie, I’ll tell you what Emmy does. Whenever Mr. Coryton comes, she fetches out that old thing” — indicating the work of art, aforesaid — “ and makes believe to paint. I say she *does* now! don’t make faces at me, Emmy — Ma says it’s vulgar to make faces, and so you’re vulgar — there! ” And this *enfant terrible* stuck his hands in his pockets and his tongue in his cheek, and considered that he had evinced a power of perception for which he ought to be rewarded. Doubtless he *was* when the visitor had taken his leave.

The shooting-party having set off from “The Towers,” Stevie wended his way towards Ruxton Court. *CLICK, click,* went the iron gate, and in an instant Mrs. Coleman and her eldest daughter were at the window.

“ It’s only Stevie,” said the former, resuming her work; “ how slowly he walks! ”

“ I’ll go and tell Grace,” said Laura, springing towards the door.

“ Stop — you’ll do no such thing — sit down! What business have you to meddle with Grace, I should like to know? ”

“ Why Mamma, dear, I thought — ”

“ I wish to goodness, Laura,” interrupted her mother, taking off her spectacles and looking her eldest born in the face, “ that you would not think. You always think wrong — remain where you are! ”

Mrs. Coleman was perfectly aware that

to warn Grace of Stephen’s approach was the surest way to make her dash up into her own room, and remain there until he was gone. She knew also that this intractable damsel was busily engaged in the conservatory, through which Stevie had to pass on his way to the drawing-room, and therefore resumed her occupation with much composure.

Stephen found the person he had come to see superintending the repotting of some choice plants. One of those very comfortable, but remorselessly ugly sun-bonnets, which look like a coal scuttle in a flounced dress, almost hid her face. Her pretty fingers were thrust into a pair of shabby old gardening gloves, and her gown, which was tucked up in some mysterious manner, disclosed the most perfect little pair of hob-nailed boots that were ever seen. In one hand she wielded a garden trowel, deftly, and in the other sat a big yellow frog, which shared, with Doggie, such affection as she had to expend upon the animal kingdom.

Great was Stevie’s surprise when, in her confusion at his unlooked-for appearance close by her side, she gave him her hand, frog and all, to shake.

Froggie hopped off into some ferns, and the under-gardener was hurrying away also when Grace stopped him.

“ Do not go, Joseph; I have not done with you yet.”

“ Beg your pardon, Miss, but it’s dinner-time,” and the man stood irresolute.

Grace made no reply, but turned upon her heel and marched quickly towards the drawing-room, into which she would have passed only Stephen intercepted her.

“ May I have two or three minutes conversation with you, Miss Lee, before you go in? ” he said in a low voice.

“ Well, what is it? What have you got to say? ”

“ I have got to tender you my sincere apologies for what occurred on Tuesday night.”

“ Oh, pray do not give yourself the trouble,” replied Grace, brusquely. “ It was nothing to me. You were the only sufferer, I think.”

“ Physically speaking, I *was*,” resumed Stephen; “ but still you must have — that is — I mean it was very awkward, and — I was much to blame for placing you in such a situation. You were — you are, I can see, annoyed? ”

“ It certainly is not pleasant to have people making wicked — talking absurdly about one,” replied Grace, flushing up angrily at the recollection of some little

spiteful speeches she had overheard on that eventful night.

"Do I understand you to hint, Miss Lee," inquired Stephen gravely, "that any one has dared to — to —?"

"You understand me to hint nothing. I never hint. I hate hints," Grace rejoined, playing a tattoo upon the encaustic tiles with one little hob-nailed boot. "And I dislike talking about disagreeable things. Pray drop the subject. I was as much to blame as you. What business had I to go gaping at a lot of grimy old pictures of people whom I don't care a straw about? It served me right; but really I think that you might have contented yourself with making me look ridiculous before all those people, without coming here to remind me of my stupidity when I had forgotten all about it."

"Oh, Miss Lee," replied Stevie, deeply hurt by the levity and harshness of her tone; "if you only knew the horror of that revelation — if you would believe me when I say that I would give the best days of my life that it should not have been made — above all things, that you should not have made it, you would not — you could not speak thus."

"Revelation?"

"I can call it by no other word."

"Perhaps you misunderstood me," said Grace, in a softer tone than she had spoken heretofore. "I merely mentioned that the ancient name of your father's house was Mangerton Chase."

"And that fact," replied Stephen, bitterly, "is — but I cannot explain. That is what I feel must place me in such a contemptible position before you; but pray give me credit, Miss Lee, for not behaving like an idiot, or — or — worse, in the presence of a lady; and believe me when I say that a far stronger and better man than I can ever pretend to be, would have been, I am sure, struck down as I was struck down by the thought which flashed out of those — to you — simple words."

"Are you in earnest?" asked Grace, turning her kind and honest eyes full in his face.

She found her answer there.

"How wretchedly ill you look," she added, half to herself: "has your wound been very painful?"

Stephen smiled sadly; but, remembering the part he had to play, replied —

"Well, rather. You see my poor brains had been half addled by the sun-stroke I had in India, and this last shake has not improved matters."

"You must remain quiet, and not think about anything that is disagreeable; you will soon be yourself again then," prescribed Dr. Grace.

"Not *think*!" Stephen replied. "Ah, if our minds were only like our arms, or that we could use them or not at our pleasure! Or, better still, like our eyes, so that we could shut them upon that which we do not wish them to dwell upon! Not think! That would be a happy state of being."

"Captain Frankland," replied Grace, in her quietest manner; "you are talking very wildly. You are, as you admit, not fully recovered from a serious attack, and are exciting yourself very unwisely. You are saying things which you will wish unsaid some day; so please let us change the subject and go into the house."

"You are right," said Stephen, with a deep sigh, as he followed her towards the door; "but you do not know what it is to have a secret grief gnawing at your heart."

Grace had plucked a flower in passing, and as Stevie spoke thus she paused and began slowly tearing it to pieces; a deep melancholy flowing over her face the while. He stood by her side watching the bright leaves as they fluttered all bruised and mangled to the ground, and the slow abstracted motions of the dear hands that destroyed them. Do you not know that sort of dreamy preoccupation which sometimes steals over one when alone with a person dreamily preoccupied? Mr. Coleman passed along the garden walk that ran along the outside of the conservatory, within five yards of where Stephen and Grace were standing, and he stopped a few moments looking at them, and trying to attract their attention. He was on the point of making a stride over the flower-plot to tap at the window, for they stood with their backs towards him, but he changed his mind and went on. He had entered the house, and was in his wife's room, up in the tower, before Grace replied.

"You are mistaken," she said in a very low tremulous voice, and turning her head aside to conceal the tears which had been gathering in her eyes, and which at last fell on the little heap of floral ruin that lay at her feet; "you are mistaken there, I do."

"Then," replied Stephen, in a tone which was an echo of her own, "you know, perhaps, what it is to yearn for some one with whom to share that grief — whom to seek for advice and comfort. I cannot tell why," he continued, after a lit-

tle, seeing that she made no reply, and as though thinking aloud ; " but in all my troubles, none of my old friends suggest themselves to me as advisers. I am always wondering what *you* would think, what *you* would do, what *you* would advise."

An indescribable expression, in which surprise, pleasure, and a little fear were strangely blended, stole over the face of his companion as our Stevie made this confession. She looked up timidly, and finding that his gaze was averted, the puzzled look melted away and gave place — must it be told — to one of sympathy and tenderness ? which deepened as it lingered on his honest, handsome, haggard face.

Ah ! if some of us could only recognize the splended chances which the whirligig of time brings round for us now and again — sometimes never to reappear, what a blessing it would be ! If Stevie had but looked round at that moment, how different might his life have been for many a day !

The stupid fellow knew that he never felt so peaceful and happy as when by her side ; that the air around her seemed full of a delicious, languor-creating perfume ; that the slightest touch of her dress thrilled through him to the quick ; that every movement of her lustrous eyes, in those moments of enchantment, seemed as though it drew his heart nearer and nearer to her own, leaving him so faint and powerless, that if he had had the surest knowledge that the touch of her lips was death, and they were bending towards him, he would have yielded to that sweet poison and drained it to the dregs. In a word, he knew that he loved her as he had never loved before ; but the idea that she felt any tenderness towards *him* ; that that sinking and trembling of her voice meant anything in particular ; that at the moment when, fascinated by the sweet presence, he stood spellbound, gazing at the scattered leaves which had been swept along by the train of her dress, she was watching him and loving him with all the strength of her pure strong heart — pouring over him a flood of tenderness from her dear, gentle eyes — never occurred to him for a moment.

It was perhaps as well that it did not ; for had he looked up, and caught her with this expression on her face, and profited by the mute avowal — it is just a toss up whether she would have frankly held out her hand, and said " Stevie, I do believe you love me, and I know that I love you ; "

or, whether she would have flown in a rage with herself for betraying herself — have vented it in refusing him — have told a big fib declaring that she had no sentiment toward him but that of friendship, &c., and then have ran away and fretted her poor little heart out in secret for all time to come.

Stephen was the first to break the silence.

" Do you remember," he asked, " that day when we came back from church, through Collyer's farm, when I found that my old tree was gone ? "

Grace bowed her head.

" You seemed to understand me then — to know what a foolish, soft-hearted fellow I am ; and it is because you spoke so kindly, that I have learned to look upon you really as a friend, notwithstanding the comparative shortness of our acquaintance."

Grace turned round upon him sharply and demanded —

" What has that — what has Mr. Tremlett been doing now ? "

" Why do you ask ? "

" I'm sure I don't know," replied Grace, resuming her former careless tone ; " idle curiosity, I suppose. You referred to an occasion upon which he had annoyed you, and, with the bad logic peculiar — as some of you say — to my sex, I jumped to the conclusion that he had been annoying you again. But pray, if we are to stand here talking at all, let us find something more pleasant to talk about. I must admit that I was vexed at what happened the other night, it did look so very awkward, and as I thought, so clumsy. You don't seem inclined to tell me what it was that could affect you so deeply ; and, though I am so stupidly curious, I don't mean to ask. I will take your word that — that there was cause, and so let it end."

" I've made an idiot of myself again," muttered Stevie, as he followed her into the drawing-room. " I've told her nothing, and yet said too much. What a whining, dreamy fool she must think me ? Why on earth could not I have said just what I had made up my mind to say and no more ? "

For our Stevie had rehearsed, as he came along, the part which he intended to play on this occasion, and had concocted an elaborate speech, in which he was to express his sorrow at having annoyed Miss Lee by his conduct in the old hall, without giving any hint as to its cause ; only, somehow or other, it all went clean out of his head the moment he began to address her.

I fancy that he is not the first, and will not be the last person that memory will play those tricks upon.

"I'd give worlds," mused Grace, "to know what he has got on his mind. Poor fellow! he seems dreadfully perplexed and worried by it. It's that precious brother. Oh if I were a man!" and she set her teeth and gave a little spiteful stamp. This took place in her own room, whither she had retired to wash her hands for luncheon, and having done so she unlocked a little box that stood upon her dressing-table, and took out some letters in which the m's and n's and w's were all alike, very sharp and angular, and the y's and g's had very long tails, and in which there was a "dearest," or a "darling," or a "sweet," in every fourth line. "That goose of a Maud Treherne, what does she mean by writing so much about him?" she said to herself. "Yes, here it is—'always talking of his brother'—'loves him dearly'—'longs to get home'—'cannot speak of anything else'—'must be very good.' Ah Maud, dear, he is good, and he said all this before he knew what a worthless pack he had left; and saw how his home had changed. Oh God!" she exclaimed, flinging up her arms, the bitter tears starting in her eyes, "it is bad enough to have no home, to know no mother, father, brother—not even to have their memory. But to have known them—to have loved them—to fancy that they still loved one, and to return and find all changed, hardened, estranged! Oh, it is cruel—cruel! Bah! if he had a spark of courage he'd pull the place down about their ears! I've no patience with such tame-spirited nonsense. I half believe that ninny of a Maud is in love with him. She ought to be ashamed of herself, writing thus about any man, and I'll tell her so—that I will!" and Grace made a dash at the letter, and having torn it, angrily, to shreds, bathed her eyes and went down to luncheon.

"I say, Gracey," demanded Master Bobby, confidentially sliding up to her, and giving her a dig with his elbow, "has Ma been rowing you?"

"No, you silly boy."

"Then what have you been crying for?"

"I have not been crying, Sir."

"Yes, you have. Here, Captain Stevie! — Grace says —"

"Hush! Hold your tongue! Oh, Bobby, do be quiet," she whispered, seizing him by the arm, "and I'll give you anything; I'll give you sixpence."

The bribe was paid, and the terrible child was pacified for a time.

Shortly afterwards Stephen took his departure. Mr. Coleman accompanied him towards the garden gate, and then, instead of wishing him good-by, laid his hand affectionately upon his shoulder, and said—

"I have seen very little of you, my boy, during these years of your life, in which character is formed for good or ill; but if the promise of your youth has not been belied, you should be an honest and an honorable man, Stephen Frankland."

"You have something particular to say to me, Sir," he said, after having cast a look of surprise in the old lawyer's face, and finding that it was very grave. "Pray go on."

"I passed the conservatory just now, when you and Grace were talking there."

Stevie felt the tell-tale blood rush into his face, and thought it best to say nothing. He nodded assent.

"Stevie, they call me a dry old stick; and so, perhaps, I am; but I love that girl as though she were my own child. She's not the common sort of girl, who fancies any man who will pay her a little attention, and can take up with one after another, like—well, like a town flirt. If any one she respected were to trifle with little Grace it would make her very unhappy for a long time, Stevie. Little Grace must not be made unhappy."

"Certainly not, Sir; certainly."

"Therefore, my dear boy—to be plain with you—though we all are very fond of you, I think you had better not come here so often."

"Good Heavens, Mr. Coleman! Why?"—exclaimed Stephen aghast.

"Because I've noticed that you seek her a good deal; and she—well! no matter about her; you cannot marry her, and you *shall* not break her heart. That's why!" replied the lawyer, with a gulp.

"Be plainer still with me," said Stevie, turning his honest gaze full upon his old friend, "and tell me why I *cannot* marry her; I can see many reasons why she would not marry *me*. I am not a rich man, never shall be, but—"

"Oh, it's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"My boy, she has no friends—no family."

"So I have been told."

"Worse than that—she is an unacknowledged child. Do you understand me? My good old friend, Spencer Fane—now dead—knew, I believe, who her father—if not her mother—was; but I

know nothing of her except that she is — spare me repeating the hard name which the law gives my good gentle little ward — and the Franklands' pride — — ”

“ To the devil with the Franklands' pride ! ” cried Stevie, bristling into a rage, and bringing his fist down upon the gate with a bang which nearly smashed it off its hinges ; “ I beg your pardon, Mr. Coleman,” he added, the next moment, wrapping his handkerchief about his bleeding knuckles, “ but really it is hardly time now to talk about the family pride. I now understand what you were driving at the other day at luncheon.”

“ Then I need not repeat to you what I said on that occasion.”

“ No, Sir, you need not,” replied Stevie. “ Grenville Frankland, my great great something or other — married a woman of low birth, low tastes, low associations, for her beauty — and he was unhappy. My father married for money and — ; well, the less said on that head, perhaps, the better. When I seek a wife I shall take warning from this. I shall not be allured by mere good looks, and I shall certainly not sell myself for a fortune. But when I hear from the lips of the girl I love the glorious news that she loves *me*, I shall be quite content in knowing that she had one ancestor who was named Adam, and another on the mother's side who was called Eve ; and if her more immediate kindred have forsaken her, and left her, poor darling ! all alone in this bad world, I'll take her still closer to my heart, and make a present of my scorn to those who have disowned her — praying God that he may keep them out of our path, though they may be the highest and proudest in the land. And so, thanking you very much, Mr. Coleman, for your warning and good advice, I will take myself and my family pride back to — to Mangerton Chase.” So saying, Stevie wrung his old friend's hand and strode away, quickly, down the path.

“ He's a noble fellow,” said Mr. Coleman, as he watched his retreating figure. “ I wish, though, that he had said something more to the point. Poor Grace — poor little girl ! How the deuce, though, did he get hold of that name ? Who has been talking to him about Mangerton Chase ? ”

“ I'll do it this very night,” muttered Stevie, as he hastened along ; “ I'll put an end to this miserable uncertainty, once and for all ; and to-morrow — ah ! to-morrow ! ”

On his way home he called at Grant's cottage and borrowed a dark lantern and

a piece of stout but slender rope of the ex-head-keeper, both of which he concealed upon his person, and arrived at Tremlett Towers just in time to dress for dinner.



CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET.

WHEN some people make up their minds to do a thing, that thing may be considered as good as done. We are wont to declare very glibly that to the brave and resolute most things are easy ; but who is brave ? — who is resolute ? I have heard of an officer who stood waist-deep in the Alma on that glorious day when the river ran red with the blood of heroes, and every yard of its surface was ploughed with round shot, or spattered with musket-balls, and there rallied his men as coolly as though he was upon parade ; but who afterwards confessed that all the time he was in mortal fear — of what ? — of horse leeches, with which that stream is said to abound ! Was he brave ? I know of one who, to carry out a vain boast, essayed to cross the Great St. Bernard alone — at night, and in a snow-storm. Was he irresolute ? I am very much of the opinion of Mr. Scrooge, who attributed the seat of valor to a less honored organ than the heart. When the ghost of the late Mr. Marley complained of his partner's incredulity, he declared boldly that he was by no means satisfied that the phantom was what he pretended to be — “ You may be a bit of undigested potatoe, for aught I know ” — pleaded this philosopher ! And truly how many ghosts there are which can be laid by a blue pill ? How many men's courage and resolution depend upon the state of their stomachs ! How many men's courage and resolution depend upon the state of that more delicate organ still — their mind ! There be bits of moral potatoe which lay there undigested, and play the deuce with us. You have begun, some of you, perhaps, to think that Stephen Frankland is but a wishy-washy sort of fellow, after all — a man with no strength of character. Be good enough to consider what he has gone through since his return to England, and that the very qualities which made him brave and strong have been grievously wounded of late. Will you back a man with a rickety, broken leg to win a foot-race ? I think

not. Is it unreasonable, then, for me to ask you, not to expect a man with an almost broken heart to act promptly — decisively — in the matter which is actually breaking it? Mind you, I am not saying that the fears and suspicions to which he was the prey *should* have had this effect. I warned you — if you remember? — at a very early period of this history that he is not a hero; and you must kindly take him as he is, for good or for bad.

If it had not been for his love for Grace Lee, it is very probable that he never would have solved the mystery of that darkened chamber, where Brandron's secret lay hid; but would have gone on worrying his life out, and concluding for the worst, and then trying to argue away his conclusions. As a man of honor, however, he determined that he would not attempt to win her love, until he was convinced of his father's innocence, and had done his duty to his dead friend. Strange as it may appear, he felt lighter and happier than for many a long day, when he made up his mind, at last, for action; and, as I have said, when some people make up their mind to do a thing, that thing may be considered as good as done. Stephen Frankland was one of these people.

His resolution was taken while Mr. Coleman spoke to him of Grace, as narrated in the last chapter, and that same night, as soon as the house was still, he climbed from the window of his room (which, as we know, was situated next to the deserted chamber), mounted on to the roof of the house, and, with the rope which he had borrowed from Grant, let himself down to the top of the oriel window, and from thence to the sill of its casement, immediately below. He then beat back the lead work of one of the small diamond-shaped panes of glass, inserted his hand, forced back the fastenings on the inside, and sprang lightly into the room.

It was much larger than he had supposed, running completely through that wing of the house, and having another window at the farther end, which was hidden, and almost blocked up by a part of the new house. There was a damp, sickly smell in the place, which, together with the exertions he had made in entering, made him feel a little faint at first, but this soon passed away. He turned the light of his lantern all round the walls, and found the apartment exactly as Brandron had described it. There was the old oak cabinet; there the mirror; there the armor — all rusty and covered with cobwebs; there the stag's head and

antlers; there the black wainscoting, behind which, *somewhere*, the papers were to be discovered. Moreover, in a recess, he saw a huge state bed, also of dark carved oak, the hangings of which, once of rich brocade, crumbled into dust in his hand as he attempted to draw them aside.

He lost no time in consideration, but advanced at once towards the panelling and sounded it.

It was all hard and immovable!

A gleam of joy passed over him — but no superficial search would content him now. His memory naturally reverted to the little chamber at Westborough, and he called to mind that the dying man, fancying himself in the scene of his thoughts, had pointed to the spot where the papers were hid. He had pointed a few yards to the right of where the sun streamed through the window, and Stephen reflected that the mid-day rays would shine, not upon the window by which he had entered, but the other. He placed himself, as nearly as he could calculate, in the exact relative position where Brandron lay, and found that the spot indicated would be in the recess behind the massive bed. Perhaps it had not stood there then? He thrust against it with all his force, and with great exertion moved it a few feet from the wall, and as he did so one of the squares of the panelling fell out!

In an instant, he was down on his knees beside the opening, had thrust his right arm into the cavity, and the first thing it encountered was a parcel covered with dust, which, upon being seized, gave forth a crackling sound, as though full of papers.

Oh! how his heart beat!

He rose, and having taken the packet to the foot of the bed, settled his lantern on a ledge of the oaken cabinet, and began to examine it.

The outer covering had evidently been a woman's silk apron, and in one part was eaten away, probably by the rats, so that the contents protruded. Stephen was too excited to open it at its fastenings, so he tore it still farther at this part, and drew forth what it contained.

"Now!" he exclaimed, almost triumphantly, "at last I have it! Letters — a sealed packet — a Bible, and — ah!" he added, half aloud, as, upon opening the book, a long narrow strip of paper, on which were printed and written characters arranged in columns, fell from between the leaves, "what is this?"

"Why, a marriage certificate. That's

about what it is," said a voice behind him, and the next moment it was snatched from his hand.

The next moment! But before it had well passed he had seized the intruder by the throat, had flung him back upon the bed, and with his knee upon his chest, held him there half-choked, and wholly powerless.

"Loose your hold, Sir — loose — loose your hold," he gasped, "or I'll alarm the house."

"Hush — h," said Stephen, in a fierce whisper, as with flashing eyes he bent over his assailant. "If you dare to utter but one cry, it shall be your last."

"My God, Sir; you don't mean murder?"

"I mean anything sooner than that you should retain that paper. What brings you here? Who are you? Stay, you need not answer; I remember you now. You are the detective I saw at Westborough."

"Right, Captain; but —."

"Not a word. Give up that paper!"

"No," replied Lagger, resolutely; "not if I can help it. Stop, loose your hold; damn it all, loose your hold! I'm not resisting you now, am I? There, that's better," he added, as Stephen, surprised at his coolness, relaxed slightly the grip he had upon his throat. "Listen; I'll only speak in a whisper, and I'll give you my word that if you'll take no advantage of me, I'll lie here, quite quiet, and take no advantage of you. Now, then; you're right, I am the detective as has charge of the Westborough murder. These here papers that you've just found have got something to do with Mr. Brandron. A cat with half an eye could see that. But it's my dooty to take 'em. You don't want any one to know as you have found 'em here, or you would not have got into the room as you did. That ain't difficult to understand. You're a strong man, Captain Frankland, and you have got the upper hand of me just now; but I ain't no chicken neither, and when we do begin our scrimmage, I expect that it wont end without some one being the wiser. That wouldn't suit you, Captain!"

"You infernal blackguard," hissed Stephen through his set teeth; "I —"

"Now, don't you call names. That ain't no sort of good. — And just you remember that your po-sition in this business ain't altogether a nice one to come out in public. — Why wouldn't you tell the Coroner all what Mr. Brandron said? Where was you the night before his body was

found? — What did you want making all those inquiries about Mary Alston at Hull? — And if these papers do re-late to the murder, why should you refuse to give them up to the law, if you're an honest man?"

"Good Heavens!" said Stephen, turning deadly pale; "you do not suppose that I —. You do not accuse me of his murder?"

"I accuse no one just now, but I mean to do before I've done, and so I tell you," replied the detective, boldly.

"Mr. Brandron confided to me certain affairs which you have no right to suppose are connected with his murder," said Stephen. "These papers relate to them. Give up what you have taken, and promise me solemnly to say nothing of this night's work, or —."

"Or what?" the detective demanded coolly.

"By Heavens, man, don't try to play with me to-night," hissed Stephen through his clinched teeth. "It would be safer to play with a tiger that had tasted blood. I am quite desperate!"

"People as have clear consciences don't get desperate," replied Lagger. "You keep yourself quiet and listen to me and reason. You don't know what these papers contain, no more than I do. Suppose they don't re-late to the murder, what harm will there be in my looking at them if I give you my word of honor —?"

"The honor of a spy! a thief-taker!"

"Ay, Sir, all that, but something more. You seal up them papers, I take your word about keeping of 'em safe as I did with the others, — and you go to Scotland-yard to Sir Richard Mayne, and ask him what he knows of the spy and thief-taker named Sampson Lagger, and whether he'd take his word? Ask him whether to his knowledge S. L. has been trusted, — in the way of his business, — with family secrets of a highly pe-culiar character; and if he has ever know'd him to betray them. Go to —; but if I were to tell you who had trusted me, I should half betray the trust. Go to Sir Richard, I say, and if he don't tell you that you may believe my word, why do what you like with the papers, I won't interfere. No, Captain; thief-taker I am, — spy I must be for the purpose, — and it ain't a bad un after all, — but I'm an honest man for all that, and not the only one in the trade."

"Go on," said Stephen, somewhat mollified by this appeal, "with what you've got to say."

"Very good. Suppose we find that

these papers re-late to this particular business of yours, *and* the murder as well, what then? Why, you attend to your department and I'll attend to mine. Adding that I won't ask you to help me, and I'll give you as much assistance as you like to ask. Now."

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then, as I said before, there'll be a scrimmage. The house will be alarmed. They will break open the door —."

"The door is walled up." The moment these words passed Stephen's lips he would have given worlds to have recalled them.

"What for?" asked Lagger quickly.

"No matter. Go on."

"Well, then, they'll come in through the window. When I saw, — quite by accident, — what you was doing, I tried to climb up by the tree, and couldn't; so I just went round to the yard and got a ladder, that I found in a shed, to see what was up. It's by the window now, and if I get my throat free, — which I mean my best to do; — I shall holler for them as hears me to come in that way. Now, Captain, you just think a bit. I've got one arm free; I've got my staff in my pocket handy; and I tell you fairly I shall use it if I can. If I gets the better of you it's all found out; if you gets the better of me, even though you was to kill me in the act, it will be all found out just exactly the same. Be sensible. Let me look over these here documents, now, and say as you'll meet me somewhere to-morrow, to consider them more careful, and I go and hold my tongue. But if you *won't* be sensible now, why give the word, and damn me, but you'll find me a tough customer, strong as you are."

"Get up," said Stephen, entirely releasing his hold. "I see there is no help for it. *I must trust you.*"

"Captain Frankland," replied the detective, rising; "they've told me as you was a brave man, and now I know it. Any fool can fight, but it wants a good plucked one to give in as you do. I declare most solemnly that I'll keep good faith to you, and I know you are too much the gentleman to try and deceive me. So now to business."

Then together they read those letters, broke open that sealed packet, and made out the contents, — as far as they went, — of that marriage certificate; and what they discovered will be told in its proper time and place. The task was not a long one; but morning began to break before the detective took his leave and descended, as he had mounted, removing the ladder

after him. All their conversation, from the very first, had been conducted in the lowest audible whisper; and even the struggle which preceded it had been so short, and owing to Lagger having been thrown back upon the bed, so quiet, that not even sharp-eared Mrs. Spraggle could have heard any sound from the next room. But there was no inhabited room next to that portion of the deserted chamber where the papers were found and the affray took place.

Stephen had already mounted on a seat which ran round the oriel window, and was in the act of quitting the chamber as he had entered it, when he was startled by hearing a low grating noise emanating from near the door. He paused and listened.

It was like that which would be made by scraping a brick with some iron instrument.

He advanced on tiptoe to the door and listened more attentively. There could be no doubt about what was going on. Somebody was attempting to break into the room from the outside!



CHAPTER XXI.

EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING.

STEPHEN FRANKLAND instantly darkened his lantern, and having stolen noiselessly to the spot from whence the sound proceeded, listened. He heard an incessant scraping, as of some sharp instrument, against the brickwork outside; the drip, drip, drip, of the detached mortar as it fell to the ground, and the heavy breathing of the worker. Now and again these sounds ceased for a while, and then came a heavier fall of mortar into the space between the bricking and the door; and sometimes the old door itself would creak as though some force was being employed against it. After this, the scraping would be resumed. Sometimes the chisel seemed to slip, and came with a dull "thud" against the paneling; and thus the listener could tell that some, at least, of the brickwork had been removed. How much he knew not. The door was not locked. The breach was being made close to the handle. The light by which the worker was operating shone through the cranny between the door and the lintel, and flickered on the ceiling above Stephen's head as he stood almost

breathless, pressing both hands upon his heart, in a vain attempt to silence its wild throbings. At any moment, — for anything that he could tell, — the work might be completed, the long closed portal opened from without, and his competitor for Brandron's secret stand face to face with him in the deserted chamber. Then flashed across his mind all that he had heard from Grant respecting the room. It was the death-chamber of his race. Every Frankland, in the direct line, for generations past, had ended his days there, — some by violence. What if the intruder, — not recognizing him in the uncertain light, — should rush upon him? If there should be a struggle, — a chance blow, — an unlucky fall, and he should become a parricide? The idea of personal danger never occurred to him; nor had he from the very first the slightest doubt as to who was toiling there at midnight to break his way into the forbidden room, or the motive for which he sought to enter it.

Have you ever experienced that wondrous faculty of the mind which enables one, — without the slightest effort of thought, — to realize, and, even, consider the consequences of an event in the same instant of time in which that event occurs, and sometimes, as we fancy, *before* it has actually happened? An idea is on its way from the outer world to your brain through your nerves. These are active intelligencies enough, but how the mind outstrip them? It seizes on the idea on its way, exposes it in every shape, unfolds its consequences, and reveals to you how they may affect years of your life, or the lives of those dear to you, before the eye or other organ of the senses has well made known that it has even started on its journey! To the metaphysician or pathologist I may be displaying gross ignorance in thus reflecting. Very probably I am. I merely attempt to describe what I have felt, — however erroneously, — to be the case on more than one occasion, and what Stephen Frankland has described as his feelings on this eventful night. His listening, after the first moment, merely taught him the mode by which an entrance was being made. The first moment taught him all else, reproduced the events of months, and created thoughts which the most rapid speaker could not clothe in language in an hour.

It taught him that the fear expressed by Brandron on his death-bed was well founded. He had betrayed the hiding-place of the papers to the person whom he

had met at Westborough. That person was now seeking them to prevent the performance of the "*act of justice*" which Stephen had sworn to execute, and who he was, could be no longer a matter of doubt.

You must pardon my attempting to give you even the faintest idea of the young soldier's misery. Place yourself in his position and try to realize it! The best tried friend you have ever known has been basely murdered, and a chain of facts, hopelessly cogent, point out your own father as his murderer! But a few hours since you have parted with the woman who has opened your heart to the softest, the noblest, the most exquisite emotions that man can entertain; who has made the world appear to you happier and purer, and in all things better than before, because her sweet presence reigns upon it. You hasten to remove the only obstacle which seems to stand between you and her love. You touch it, and instantly the flood-gates of a sea of blood are opened, and your life's welfare is wrecked, beyond hope, upon the hideous tide!

The same moment in which this terrible blow was struck revealed a long array of its inevitable consequences. How could he explain his future conduct? He saw himself misrepresented by the world, misjudged by friends, condemned by those whose good esteem he valued. He could never gladden his eyes with the sight of Grace again. The home towards which his strong, brave heart, had yearned so tenderly, was no place for him now. He saw himself returned to his Indian career, a careworn, broken-spirited man, dragging on a haunted life, with the possibility that any hour might bring him the news that his father had expiated an inhuman crime by a disgraceful death. Such small matters, even, as when and how he should take his departure in the morning, presented themselves side by side with those graver fears and mournful reflections. I may be told, perhaps, that I am describing impossibilities; but any one who has ever fallen from a height, and remembers the number of ideas, — serious and absurd, — which crowded themselves into the few seconds during which he was passing through the air, will know that the picture is not an exaggerated one. It was all the work of an instant.

In an instant, also, Stephen had made up his mind what was to be done; and he paused, listening — as I have said — only for the purpose of resolving when and how to do it. He determined to surprise

the worker at his work, and to say and know the worst at once. Procrastination had vanished with the doubt which encouraged it.

At first he thought of bursting open the door; but a moment's reflection sufficed to show him that he might not be able to do this with one effort, and that the worker, alarmed at the noise, would escape him. Moreover, the breach in the brickwork might not, as yet, be large enough for him to thrust his body through in pursuit. He might have waited, indeed, until an entrance had been effectually made from without, and the seeker of Brandon's papers had entered the room, but the suspense was too great for him: "And how am I sure," he thought, "that his entrance will be made to-night at all?" No! He felt that his only safe course would be to return to his own chamber by the way he had come, and to surprise the worker in the passage. There could be no escape then!

Silently he made his way to the open window, and gained the roof of the house by means of the rope which still hung from the parapet. It was more difficult to mount than to descend, of course, and yet the great clock on the stairs which had chimed the quarter to two o'clock some minutes before he had begun his retreat, had not struck the hour before he found himself again in his own room, with his hand on the lock of the door prepared to spring upon the worker in the act.

Do you think badly of Stephen Frankland when I say that he trembled in every limb, and that a miserable sickness stole over him and sapped his strength?

He threw open the door, and staggered rather than sprung into the corridor towards which hung the tapestry which concealed the entrance to the deserted chamber.

No one was there!

Aghast at a discovery so opposite to what he had expected, he paused and listened. The house was still as death, but for the monotonous ticking of the great clock and the louder beating of his heart. There hung the old tapestry as it had hung for years. Not a particle of dust or mortar was on the floor. He drew aside the hangings and there was the rough brickwork complete.

Had he been dreaming?

Perplexed, bewildered, half-stupefied with wonder, he leant for support against the wall, and it gave way with him!

It was evidently no dream! The bricks had been cut out and replaced carefully.

The worker had done his work for that night, and would return to it the next!

He could now account for the mysterious noises which the guests had been talking about during the last two days, and wondered how it was that he had not heard them, — he whose bed-head was within a few yards of the spot from whence they proceeded, — he who was usually such a light sleeper! Short had been his hours of rest since Grace Lee had made that portentous revelation, until these last two nights, during which he had slept, as he now remembered, long and heavily, and in the morning had woken up dull and unrefreshed. "Is it possible," he thought, "that I have been drugged?" No! A second thought showed him that this could not be. He had taken nothing from his father's hand which could contain a narcotic. He had not even been in his company for some hours before retiring for rest. He had spent the latter part of each evening with Lord Rossthorne, with whom he had always been a favorite, and whose gout had become so severe as to confine him to his dressing-room. There Stevie had sat chatting with him till nearly midnight, and smoking the inevitable cheroot. On each occasion he remembered that he had drank a tumbler of weak brandy and water, as was his wont, just before retiring for the night. The spirit had been taken from the case of bottles in ordinary use. The water had been brought up a moment before by Sanderson, the old lord's valet, for his master's use. The more Stephen considered, the more he felt convinced that the only person who had an interest in drugging him could not have tampered with this drink; and the more he considered the more he felt convinced that, somehow or other, he had been drugged. Thus wise one can be after the event!

Stephen returned slowly to his own chamber, but not to rest. If a narcotic had been administered again this night, the excitement which he had undergone was sufficient to neutralize its effect. No sleep for him.

He threw open the window, and, with a heavy heart, gazed into the opening day, — into the bright, opening hours of morning that so few of us see, except with jaded eyes after a night of pleasure and of pain; the bright, opening hours in which every created thing but Man joins in a triumphant hymn of praise to the Great Creator, and of welcome to his sun. And the fresh morning breeze, full of the perfume of a thousand newly-opened flowers, — full of the melody of newly-wakened birds, —

full of health and promise, — played on his throbbing brow, and brought him some relief. Reflection began to point out one little spot — not of light, but of less than the surrounding blackness — in the storm-clouds which had gathered over his life. There was no direct mention of his father in the papers over which he had glanced with the detective in the old oak-panelled room. The latter had not heard the worker at his work. He had promised that they should work out the clue together, and Stephen had given no pledge which would prevent him from warning his father the moment that he became in peril. Brandon had wished him to escape. The victim of his crime had not called for vengeance, so that the *act of justice* were completed. Who, then, had a right to demand blood for blood ?

The rising sun was not above the hills, before Stephen had resolved upon the course he should pursue. He might have waited till the following night, and, taking care that nothing should interfere with his watchfulness, surprise the worker at his work, or in the act of seeking for the secret, and in the terror of the moment wring from him a confession of all that the papers left undisclosed. But he scorned the idea of playing the spy on any one, much more upon his father. Through all, and in spite of all, he felt that he *was* his father, and, notwithstanding his crimes, to be dealt with frankly and with compassion by a son. "I will tell him plainly what I know," resolved Stephen. "If he chooses to have confidence in me, and explain this fearful mystery, well and good; if not, I must work it out my own way. In either case," he mused, gazing with glittering eyes over the brightening landscape, so suggestive, as we know, of happy reminiscences, "one thing is quite clear, the house which once was Mangerton Chase is no longer a home for me."

So he set to work at once to make preparations for his departure; and remembering that he had left in the library his desk, which contained Brandon's letters and other papers of importance, was descending thither to obtain it, when, upon passing a partly-opened door, a voice from within called out —

"Sanderson — Sanderson ! Is that you ?"

It was Lord Rossthorne's voice, and it sounded as if he were in pain.

"No, it is I — Stephen. Can I do anything for you ? May I come in ?"

"Oh, of course; but I did not know you were such an early riser," added

the old nobleman, as Stevie entered the room.

"I do not think that any one is up yet. Shall I go and rouse your servant ? or, can I get you what you want ?"

"You can, indeed, Stevie, if you do not mind playing the sick-nurse to an old cripple for five minutes. Do you see a bottle on the mantel-piece containing a dark fluid and marked *chlorodyne*. Well, measure me out thirty drops of that, and give it me in a wine-glassful of water. I have had a wretched night, and my old enemy has just opened a heavy battery upon my right knee; but if you would only help me to take him in reverse, and spike some of his guns with the help of that little bottle, — No, not that one, the next ! Thanks."

Lord Rossthorne was sitting up in bed as Stephen entered, wrapped in an old dressing-gown of plain blue flannel; but there was an innate look of grace and dignity about him which nothing could lessen. They say that no man is a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*, and, perhaps, Lord Rossthorne was no exception to the rule. If you were to take him, however, when racked with agony and dress him in rags, he would look every inch a peer !

The same thing with his words. There was a charm — not so much in what he said, but in his manner of saying it, which it was very difficult to resist. He was so courteous; so considerate, so ready with some flattering expression of thanks for the slightest service; and yet there was an under-current of command running through it all.

"I remember," he said, as Stephen was preparing the medicine, "reading a very clever little article some time ago, upon bad nights. The writer discussed them under two heads, — 'the bad night early' and 'the bad night late.' In 'the bad night early' you cannot get to sleep when you go to bed, but doze off at last, and wake up refreshed at your usual hour. In 'the bad night late' you get your first nap without trouble, start up thinking it is time to rise, find that you have only rested for an hour or so, and spend the remainder of your time making your bed uncomfortable, and counting the long hours as they drag along. I have had 'the bad night late.'"

"Did anything disturb you, then ?" asked Stephen, quickly, pausing in his occupation.

"No. I woke about two or half-past, and have not been able to close my eyes for more than ten minutes at a time, since. Ah ! that's capital," he added, as he tossed

off the draught which Stephen now handed to him. "It is an excellent anodyne, and is all the better for being administered by a friendly hand. It is not a pleasant thing, Stevie, my boy, to be left all alone in the world at my time of life, — to receive no care or attention save what one buys of servants. It is a natural consequence of old age, though; one of the penalties of having lived too long," he added, sadly, "and I must not complain."

"One may have lived too long and incur it," replied Stephen, in a low, tremulous voice, "without being old."

Lord Rossthorne watched his averted face attentively for a few moments, and then, laying his hand kindly on his arm, said —

"I have wished to speak to you, Stevie, about yourself. The present seems a good opportunity. Can you spare me a little time, or are you going to be busy this morning? If so, I —"

Stephen drew a chair to the bedside and sat down.

"Remember," said the peer, "that I knew your mother; that I have known you since you were a child, and I think we have always been good friends; have we not?"

"You have always been very kind to me, my Lord."

"Tut, tut! There is nothing so good for an old man who has seen, perhaps, too much of the world, as the society of a frank, loyal boy who had yet to enter it. You gave me that society, Stevie, a few years ago. It was *you* who were kind to me. I am younger in heart now than I was then; and you, I am afraid, are older. May we speak now as equals?"

"Say what you please. It is sure to be generous and kind."

"Well, then, when last I saw Percy Coryton — it is not often that he honors me with his company, though he is my heir, but let that pass — when we last met, he could talk of nothing else but you and your doings here. How well you looked, how you were the life and soul of the place, how cleverly — I suppose I must put with it — you, to use his own expression, 'sat upon' your half-brother. In a word, he gave me the idea that things were going on here as they should be; for I must confess," added Lord Rossthorne, with a smile, "that the little I have seen of Mr. Tremlett gives me the notion that he wants a good deal of 'sitting upon,' — whatever that operation may be, — if its results are the abatement of pretentious, and therefore offensive pride. But the

few days I have spent here suffice to show me that my nephew has been very much mistaken, or else that your position has encountered some grave change. I know that it is a most delicate and difficult one. I am inclined to believe that my latter view is the correct one, and I think I am not presuming upon our friendship, Stephen, when I ask you if I am not right?"

"You are; but you must not blame Frank," added our Stevie, quickly, "I mean he is not so much to blame, after all. You see I had home so constantly before my mind's eye whilst I was away in India, that when I returned I could not realize how many years had passed or how many things had happened — how greatly my brother's authority had advanced since I left. His education has been so different to mine — so much better. He has mixed with a set so different, again, to the set I have lived amongst — so much cleverer. I own I think him hard and — and worldly; but I'll be bound there is many a man who has double my brains who will give him credit for much good sense."

"Double your brains!" mused the peer; "Hum — m! this is a question more of heart than brains, Stephen Frankland."

"Of course," replied the young soldier, mistaking his meaning; "and when a man is tried to death out in India, without anything to do, or occupy his mind, he gets dreamy and thin-skinned, and grows sulky, like me, when he comes home, if everybody does not fall down and worship him. I don't know whether it is that the bond of relationship slackens as we get on in life, or whether other ties, contracted during absence from one's kith and kin, take its place. I would do a great deal for my brother Frank, but I am not ashamed to own — now that I have seen him as a man — that there are those — my old Colonel, for example — whom I like — no, that's too cold a word — whom I *love* better than he. Why, then, should I blame him for affecting other people and their ways, more than me and mine?"

"How is it that you speak entirely of your half-brother?"

"Because I have no right to criticize the conduct of any one else in this house — nor will I do so. They take their own course."

"Then why do not you take yours?" replied the peer. "It is tolerably clear to me from what you say, and *certain* from your manner of saying it, that your associations here are no longer pleasant. Why not form new ones? You are young, the world is still all before you. You expected

to find happiness in one place — it is not there! Shake the dust off your feet and seek it elsewhere. You expected to find the old bond of love strong and close — it has rusted, and crumbling away. Take heart of grace, man, and forge another that will last you your life. In a word — marry."

Stephen flushed crimson. "Marry! I marry! Impossible!"

Lord Rossthorne smiled; "My dear boy," he said, "to a young fellow with your appearance in possession, and a title in prospect, nothing in the matrimonial market is 'impossible.'"

"You would have me sell myself and my name for a fortune," replied Stephen, bitterly. "No, my Lord. To me of all men in the world I think such a proposition might have been spared."

"You quite misunderstand me, and the fault is mine for expressing myself so clumsily. God forbid that I should urge you to an unworthy union! You ought to know me better, Stevie, than to suppose such a thought to be in my mind. Before I was your age, I was a father. My wife and my children were taken from me one by one; but still my married life, short as it was, was a happy one. Who is it who said 'It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.' I speak for your happiness and your welfare."

"But I must consider the happiness and welfare of another. I cannot look upon marriage as the one-sided bargain which so many men regard it. What have I to give a woman in return for the privations — loss of friends — destruction of old associations, which she must sustain in becoming my wife. You do not know what Indian life is, Lord Rossthorne, or you would not ask me to subject one I might love to its monotony, its sufferings, its temptations."

"I ask you to do no such thing. I see no necessity for you to return to India — nay, do not interrupt me. Listen! I am your godfather, as well as your friend, and am entitled to preach. Did I not promise and vow that you should hear sermons," said the old nobleman, gayly. "I am a very lonely man, Stevie, and cannot afford to lose one who does not mind sometimes giving up himself to be bored by me, as you do. Master Percy is a wondrously fine gentleman, and would make a passable Baron Rossthorne, if the title did not die with me. But my fortune has always been ample — my expenditure, for many years, very moderate, and there is room for others in my will. Moreover, though

I never mixed much in politics, I am not without some influence with those who do. So if you are determined to adhere to your profession, now that there is every prospect of your army being consolidated with that of the Queen, why there is no reason why your services should be confined to India. If politics have any charm for you, there is a borough not a thousand miles from here, which I think would look kindly upon a candidate who had my support — the more so, because I have never attempted to influence its choice hitherto. Ah, Stevie! I see the old Frankland pride twitching at your nostrils and darkening your brow. I know exactly what you would say about obligations and independence, and the rest of it. Don't say it, Stevie. Take pity upon a poor gouty hermit, whom you can put under greater obligations than ever he can impose upon you. Stay in honest old England. Marry, and let an old lonely man have a corner on your hearth. Let him hear again the sound of children's voices, and, if God spares him to live, let him have something to live for."

Stevie had buried his face in his hands as the peer proceeded — too much moved by the earnestness of the appealing gaze, which once met his own, to dare to encounter it again.

"Your own kindred could do all this," he said at last, in a musing tone, without raising his head.

"Not so," said Lord Rossthorne, speaking more calmly than before. Young Coryton, as I have already said, is a very good sort of young fellow, but not my sort. He stayed with me last Christmas — a sort of duty visit. It was a great sacrifice, I know, for him to leave Melton, and drag through seven days with me in my old house; but this I can assure you, I did not bore him half as much as he bored me. It is said that no man likes those who will succeed him. You have done me so much good this morning, that I feel half induced to make an execrable pun, and say that I object to Percy Coryton's *airs*. Rossthorne and the bulk of my fortune will go to him as a matter of course. I shall leave his brother something more — something more for the proper maintenance of his title; a few thousands will go in legacies and charity, and you will have to discuss what becomes of the residue with my executors; for my will is made, and it will be yours whether you like it or not."

"You cannot expect me to answer you now!" exclaimed Stephen, almost angrily, starting from his chair and pacing up and

down the room. "Why do you speak to me thus now? *now*, when — give me time, give me time! But oh, do not think me ungrateful!" checking himself, he added suddenly. "If I cannot find words to tell you how I thank you — how heartily I thank you — not for your generous offers; no, no, I am not thinking of them now, but for having saved me from the bitter, bad thoughts which have been haunting me. There are good men left in the world after all. There is a use for every life, however blighted it may appear."

"Bah! You have no business with such thoughts at your age. You are hipped and disappointed now, naturally enough. Never mind what has passed; you'll see it in a different light some day. You are too sensitive. Besides, it may all come right again."

"You would not say that if you knew all," said Stevie, gloomily.

"I desire to know no more than I do at this moment," replied the peer, "and that is, that you can never be at peace here. I have told you what to expect at my death. Why wait till then? Take it now, with the advice which I gave you just now. Sit down by my side again, and hear me quietly, for I have not done yet. That's right. I am now going to act the father confessor, and require to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, upon a very delicate point. I have heard some of the guests here couple your name with that of a Miss Lee, in the vulgar badinage which some people think it witty to indulge in."

"Who has dared to —?" burst out Stevie.

"Never mind," interrupted the speaker. "Do not let us diverge from the main track. Was it that young lady who was here with Mr. Coleman and his family the night that I arrived?"

"It was."

"She is pretty, well educated evidently; agreeable, and lady-like. You might do worse, Master Stevie!"

"She is all you have said and more; but I can never ask her to become my wife," he replied, gloomily.

Then came a lengthened pause, during which the peer plucked nervously at the tufts of the counterpane. At last he lifted his head with a sigh, and said —

"Do you remember a conversation which we had when you came to wish me good-bye, just before you left for India?"

"I do, well."

"I ventured to give you some advice

upon a subject which, I regret to learn, applies to the position of this young lady. I was much struck with one of your replies. I have thought it over many times since, and now repeat it to you. It is not for us, Stephen Frankland, to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children!"

"It is not that," cried Stevie, eagerly; "believe me, it is not that. She would make a wife of whom the proudest in the land might be proud. The obstacle is all on my side — God help me!"

"Then you do love her?" exclaimed the peer.

"I do — with all my heart — with all my soul." And all his heart and all his soul seemed to beam through his honest brown eyes as he made the confession.

"She has refused you, then?"

"No."

"You have never spoken to her of love?"

"Never."

"And you will not?"

"I have not done so."

"Hem!" mused Lord Rossthorne. "I think I see. One more question, and this the last. Who is this Colonel Vincent, whom Sir George and Lady Tremlett appear to have taken such a fancy for? He was talking a good deal about India a night or two ago, before you reappeared," the peer continued, without waiting for a reply; "and I thought perhaps you might know him."

"I have no personal knowledge of him," Stevie replied; "but, if he be the person I suspect him to be, I have heard of him, and not to his advantage."

"Ha! I am not generally affected by first impressions, but I must own that I took a dislike to him from the moment when we were introduced. I don't like his eyes: you meet them incessantly when he is not speaking to you, and never when he is."

Thus craftily did the peer attempt to divert Stephen's mind from dwelling upon the main subject of their colloquy, perceiving with excellent tact that it was not one to be pressed. Gradually he led the conversation back to it, and began to make arrangements for the future, as though it had been definitely settled as he wished. But Stephen's manner was gloomy and absent, and his replies were sometimes strangely at variance with what had gone before.

"You must fix a day to come to Rossthorne, before I leave," said the peer; "and if I can shake off this attack, I must bid you good-by the day after to-morrow."

"I go to-day."

"Indeed! So soon?" exclaimed Lord Rossthorne. "Can you not wait till I go, and accompany me?"

"Much as I should like to do so, I fear I must say no. I have that before me which cannot be postponed. I must be in Derby to-day at four o'clock."

"But surely you can return. How long will this business, whatever it is, occupy you?"

"I cannot tell. I——"

"At any rate you will join me when it is concluded."

"Ah, when," replied Stevie, with a deep sigh. "If I only knew what would happen then?"

"There's something on your mind, my boy, beyond what I know," said Lord Rossthorne, after a pause. "Confidence is seldom worth having when it is asked for, but help proffered at the right time has often a double value. Can I assist you? If so—how? I will add this much only, that should your troubles be those which are commonest with young men in your profession—an expensive and ill-paid one—my solicitor shall give you a panacea which will set them at rest forever."

"You are all goodness. Oh, my Lord," Stevie exclaimed, "how shall I ever be able to convince you how deeply grateful I am; and should I be driven to decline all your generous offers—if I should even be compelled to renounce the privilege of sharing your roof, and doing my little best to solace you for the dear ones over whom you mourn—if—" and the speaker's face grew very sad—"if it must be that this meeting should be our last—think of me at my best. Deem me not ungrateful—anything but that; and whatever you may hear of me,—however unnatural my conduct may seem—believe—and I will never ask you to believe a lie—that all I do is done in the execution of a duty which I should be a villain to disregard."

And whilst Lord Rossthorne was yet overcome by the surprise which this strange speech occasioned, Stephen had fallen on his knees beside the bed, had uttered one fervent "God bless you" and pressed his hand, and without another word or look rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW A STORM GATHERED OVER TREMLETT TOWERS.

FOR most of us who have led country lives, there is, I think, some quiet spot which we seek in times of trouble or of joy. To stranger eyes it is merely a shady nook—a pleasant walk, a seat in an old arbor, or the corner of a windowsill. In our eyes there is erected thereon a temple sacred to THOUGHT; and to us—its chief and only Priest—alone is revealed its mysteries. What sacrifices have been made upon its altar—what innocent and happy rites have been celebrated in its groves—what temptations have been whispered amidst its cloisters—what lamentations have echoed round its garlands, no tongue but ours can tell. Childhood first erected it; Love's rosy fingers have piled its golden pinnacles; and, even amongst its ruins, Age need not look in vain for consolation.

Such a spot you may be sure there was for a man of Stephen Frankland's temperament, and thitherward he instinctively wandered as soon as he found himself in the open air, after having quitted Lord Rossthorne in the abrupt fashion narrated in my last chapter.

It was a spot down in the park, about a mile from the house, where a little babbling stream which appeared to be deviating its course through the open country beyond, had apparently changed its mind at some epoch in its existence, and with a sort of "No-I'll-be-hanged-if-I-do" air, had turned sharp round and dashed into a plantation of young ash-trees, over which certain giant oaks watched with a fatherly and protecting air, as though they had been appointed their guardians by some Court of Equity amongst the sylvan deities, in which perhaps the great god Pan is Lord Chancellor. This was one of the scenes to which his day-dreams on board ship had so often transported him, and there we may leave him with his thoughts—which the reader, who knows him pretty well by this time, cannot fail to divine.

An hour afterwards—whilst the morning was still young—he retraced his steps, and on entering the shrubbery which skirted Lady Tremlett's particular flower-garden, he caught a glimpse of a white dress through the laurels. My Lady was not given to early rising, and supposing that the promenader might be Mrs. Spraggle, or the Hon. and Rev. Mrs. Theophilus Corbyle,—personages, either

of whom he did not care to encounter in his present frame of mind,— Stevie turned into a thickly-planted by-path, which a stranger would not be likely to find, and hurried towards the house. At a bend, however, in its maze-like windings, he came full tilt against the wearer of the white drapery, and found that it really was his step-mother out at that unusual hour, and not alone! An ugly frown darkened over Stephen's brow when he found that Colonel Vincent was her companion.

Lady Tremlett uttered a shrill cry of fear, and clung to the Colonel; then, when she saw who it was that had surprised them, uttered a little shrill cry of surprise and clung to Stevie.

The Colonel was not in the least disconcerted, but drew lines on the gravel walk with the point of his cane, and observed —

“ This charming spot seems to be a place of general rendezvous. Lucky for me that it is so. I should have lost my way in the labyrinth, if Lady Tremlett had not just come up by accident.”

“ Oh, yes, Stevie dear, I assure you, quite by accident,” added My Lady, eagerly. “ I have only just this moment come out; breakfast is so late; I don't know what Jones can be about.”

Stevie made no reply, and all three turned back together. As soon as they reached the lawn, Colonel Vincent suddenly remembered that he had promised to show Sir George some coins which he had in his room, and went into the house to get them.

“ The first bell has not rung yet,” said Stevie, as soon as the visitor was out of hearing; “ will you walk a little way with me, now?”

“ But, Stevie, I was not walking with him, and it's very wicked of you to say so!”

“ I did not say so.”

“ But you *think* I was; you know you do, Stevie! And you'd go and tell Francis, and — ”

“ Dear Mammie,” said Stevie, taking her arm, and drawing it within his own, “ why should you think that I would play the spy upon your movements? I am very glad that I have met you, though, and I will tell you why. Now, pray don't be offended with what I am going to say. I love you, and respect my father's wife too much to venture, for one moment, to dictate to her the course which she ought to pursue towards any gentleman — any person who might be under her roof; but

when I tell you that I am convinced this Colonel Vincent is one with whom no man of honor, knowing his antecedents, would associate, I think you will see that you ought to be very careful how you admit him to the least degree of intimacy.”

“ He is a wicked — dreadful creature, and I never will speak to him again. I won't, indeed, Stevie,” burst forth Lady Tremlett, flushing crimson.

Stevie was surprised. “ Has any one else told you? How do you know?” — he asked.

“ He has — that is, I — you. Oh, how tiresome you are, Stevie!” stammered My Lady; “ did you not say so just now?”

“ Well, Mammie dear,” said her stepson, caressing affectionately the little hand which trembled on his arm, “ we will not talk any more about it; of course we must be civil to him while he remains your guest. Only, take my advice, and drop his acquaintance.”

“ But he is a relation of the Dean; and what has he done?”

“ I cannot tell you. I have written to a friend who can say if my suspicions are well founded. You shall know when I get an answer; but see! there's Frank calling to us. Let us go in.”

As they approached the open broad windows of the breakfast-room “ dearest Francis” came running out to meet them in a high state of excitement for so (generally) self-possessed a personage.

“ Oh! I've found you at last,” he said, out of breath, and waving his arms about, vaguely. “ Come with me! come this way, at once!”

“ What do you mean? — where? — what has happened? — can't you speak, man?” said Stephen.

“ Ask no questions, but follow me. Come and judge for yourself. Come this way! I tell you, at once.”

And he crossed the hall, followed quickly by Lady Tremlett and Stevie, towards his father's so-called “ study” — the room where we saw that ugly-looking letter burned a month or two ago — and flung open the door with a crash, revealing Sir George standing, the picture of misery, by the mantel-piece, and two odd-looking men seated on the extreme edges of two chairs, brushing their two hats with the cuffs of their two coats, nervously, and watching him. One glance sufficed to send the blood tingling to the roots of Stephen's hair.

“ My God!” he exclaimed, half aloud; “ it's come!”

“ Dear! dear! dear!” cried Lady

Frankland, "what is the matter? What do these dreadful creatures want? Do look at their dirty shoes all on the nice clean drugged."

"Beg your pardon, marm, I mean My Lady, if you *be* My Lady," said one of the men, rising, "there ain't no call for you to put yourself about. We've just come down from London to take Sir George Tremlett, Barrowknight, and we've been and took him as a gentleman ought to be took. All he's got to do is to come along gently with us — leastwise, if he has to come at all," he added in an undertone. "What's a hundred or two to a gentleman as lives in a house like this?"

"Do I understand you to mean that money can settle this — this affair?" asked Stephen in a whisper.

"Of course! Why, what can't money settle? Debt, two hundred and eighteen pounds; costs, forty-five pun ten and sixpence, — total, two hundred and sixty-three pun ten shillings and sixpence."

The words "Debt" and "Costs" have not usually a pleasant sound, particularly when uttered by a sheriff's officer; but oh! what music they made in Stephen Frankland's ears! He gave a great gasp of relief and said —

"Then this arrest is only for a debt!"

"Only for a debt!" sneered Mr. Tremlett; "but for one of nearly three hundred pounds, and Sir George has just now acknowledged that he has not got three hundred pence to pay it with."

"Hush — h, Frank!" cried Stephen, casting an angry look from his half-brother to the bailiffs; but he was not to be hushed.

"It is right," he continued, "that these men should be told — it is right that their employers should know how matters stand. What business had they to trust him with two hundred and eighteen pounds?" demanded this dutiful son.

"Ah!" commented My Lady, playing with her bracelets; "what business had they to trust him with so much money? Why, it's more than dear Francis paid for that brace —"

"It is enough to found an infant school," interrupted the dear fellow, unwilling, perhaps, that the purchase in question should be mentioned just then, "and do inestimable good; whereas, most probably, it has been squandered — squandered foolishly, if not worse. What, I ask, is there to show for it?"

The poor Baronet lifted his head at this appeal, and replied —

"I will tell you — nothing!"

"There! you hear — 'Nothing.' Two hundred and sixty-three pounds, besides the shillings (which alone would pay the weekly wages of many a respectable family), and all for nothing! It is too bad. What has become of the money?"

"Listen and you shall know all. The debt, out of which —"

"Beg your pardon, Sir," said the bailiff who had spoken before; "but if you'll give me your word, as a gentleman, not to try to escape by the window, we'll go outside out of hearing. We don't want to hear family matters, do us, Jim?"

"What you say, Tom," replied the other man, "I *ollus* sticks to; What does the gentleman say?"

"That he thanks you for a degree of consideration from which others" — with a glance towards his second son — "might well take example. Still, he begs you to remain. You have heard too much not to hear what yet remains. Sit down. I was speaking," continued Sir George, after a few moments of apparently painful consideration, "of the original debt, out of which my present liabilities arise. It amounted to more than twelve hundred pounds, Francis, and was contracted before you were born."

"Oh, poor dear; and he has paid all the rest out of his pocket-money!" observed Lady Tremlett. "Well, it might be a great deal worse."

"I have paid it, principal and interest, twice over, Rhoda."

"Oh, why did you not tell these creatures so at first, and send them away?"

"I will explain all to you, dear," replied the Baronet in a broken voice; for the little gleam of kindness in his wife's manner had softened his poor weak heart. "I borrowed the money — it matters not after all these years to inquire why — upon promissory notes; and, when I could not pay these as they became due, I had to renew them — I mean I had to sign others, and give sometimes as much as fifty pounds at a time for the indulgence; and yet had the same amount to pay, with accumulating interest, in the end. You know what my income has been, and you may judge to what shifts I have been driven to meet these extortionate demands, and yet pay off nearly a thousand pounds of the debt. I tell you frankly I have been obliged to borrow of friends for this purpose. I owe Lord Rossthorne a hundred pounds, and Coleman has my I. O. U.'s for a hundred and seventy at this moment."

"In short," observed dearest Francis to

his mother, "he has gone on wasting the means that he had, and incurring fresh liabilities without the remotest prospect of ever being able to discharge them. Exposing us to strangers, too, in this way! Bringing bailiffs into the house before all my friends! What are we to think of such conduct? If I were called upon in my capacity as a county magistrate to express my opinion, I should call it — oh!"

Stephen had been endeavoring in vain to frown the speaker into silence; but he lectured with his head in the air, after his usual lofty style, and did not perceive or heed the gestures — now beseeching — now angry — that were addressed to him. In seizing him by the arm, our Stevie only meant to compel his attention, but such was the honest fellow's indignation that his great brown fingers closed, in spite of him, upon his brother's tender flesh with such force, that the threatened judicial dictum degenerated into the cry of a beaten child, and it was some days before five black spots faded out of the dear fellow's skin.

"Silence," whispered Stephen, huskily on his ear, whilst he still writhed in that iron grasp. "Have you no respect — no pity?"

"Eh, let him be, Sir," said the spokesman bailiff; "let him have his little talk out. We're accustomed to this sort of thing, ain't us, Jim? Gentleman as as to pay other gentleman's debts ollus likes to have a bit of talk fust. It's natural they shud want summut for their money. Let him be."

"I — I am not going to pay the debt!" cried Francis, forgetting his bodily pain in the keener anguish which the idea of being called upon to pay for his father's release occasioned. "I — I have nothing whatever to do with this affair!"

"Then you ain't one of the parties as is liable on these bills, supposing the Barrow-knight's obleeged to go to quod," inquired the bailiff, producing the two ominous slips of paper, on the back of which Sir George Tremlett's dishonored acceptances were set out.

"I never sign bills — upon principle."

"Pr'aps you're a going to lend him the money?"

"No such thing, man! How dare you?"

"If you ain't a party to the bills, and ain't a going to lend the money to pay 'em, who the dickens are yer. You can't be a relation by the way you talk."

"Fellow, I am a relation, and — "

"Then," cried the bailiff, in a burst of honest indignation, "I'm damned — I beg your Lordship's pardon, but I am damned if you oughtn't to have your head punched."

"Hold your tongue," thundered Stephen, coming forward from the window where he had stood chafing and burning with shame during the above colloquy; "you forget yourself. May I see those papers?"

"Certainly, Sir;" and the man placed them in his hand.

"For God's sake bring this scene to an end one way or the other," said Sir George, faintly. "I am legally bound to pay this money, or go to jail. Rhoda, what do you say?"

My Lady thus appealed to, appealed in turn to her son —

"Dearest Francis, you are so very clever! Tell me, what do I say?"

The dear fellow maintained a dogged silence for some moments, and then muttered —

"It is bad enough to have to pay the debts, but the costs are more disgraceful still. Forty-five pounds, ten shillings and sixpence for costs! all of which might have been avoided. Why did he not come and tell us — you, I mean — why did he not go and tell *you* when the bills were coming due that he could not pay them?"

"Oh yes, my love, you ought to have come and told me — Francis is quite right."

"Still I suppose," continued the dear fellow, "that the money must be paid — that is, I mean *advanced*."

"I only ask it as a loan, my dear Rhoda," the Baronet pleaded, "only as a loan. In a year or two it will be replaced. You know," he added, in a low voice, "that you have it in your power to deduct it from my — my allowance."

At this moment Stephen, who had retired with the writs to a side-table and had there been writing, came forward with them, and a third slip of paper in his hand and addressed the bailiffs.

"There are, I see, two bills;" he said, "one for a hundred and sixty-five pounds, and the other for fifty-three. Here is a cheque upon my agents in London for the larger amount and the costs. In all, two hundred and ten pounds ten and sixpence. I am sorry that I cannot draw at present for the balance, but I am going to town in a few hours — I will accompany you, if you desire it — and shall be able to give your employers ample security for payment of the entire debt in three days. Will this do?"

"Dear Stevie," exclaimed My Lady, "how very kind. I must really give him a kiss—so generous!"

"Hum," sneered Mr. Tremlett, "I did not know that captains in Indian regiments could afford such romantic notions. I only hope he is as just to his own creditors, as he is inclined to be generous towards those of—of—"

"His father," said Stephen, sternly. "I do not wonder, Frank," he added, in a lower tone, "that the word sticks in your throat."

"The gentleman—who is a gentleman as I can see with half a eye," said the bailiff, turning the cheque over in his hand, "axes if this 'ere sort of thing will do. Well, generally speaking, it *won't*. Generally speaking, we has orders to take nothing but the brass or bank-notes, which comes to the same thing. But in this 'ere case we has instructions not to be hard on the Barrowknight, and to take any good security for the debt. Well, is this 'ere a good security? You ain't much of a speaker, Jim, but you ain't often took in; what do *you* call it?"

Jim turned his little ferret eyes upon Stevie's anxious face, and then upon the cheque, and after a short deliberation gave the following verdict, solemnly—

"I calls it a hout and houter."

"Then that's settled," said his chief, rising and preparing to replace his papers in a huge greasy pocket-book; "and I've your word, Mr.—Mr.—"

"My name is Frankland. I am a captain in the army, and Sir George Tremlett's son—his eldest son."

"Hey! why didn't you say that before? That makes right righter."

"Stop," interrupted Mr. Tremlett; "I must interpose here. Rejoiced as I am to find Sir George released from his painful position, I cannot allow credit to be received under a false pretence."

"A false pretence!" exclaimed Stephen.

"At any rate a suppression of the whole truth. You have said that you are my father's eldest son, and these good men will go away under the impression that you have some claim upon this property, whereas—"

"I have none. If I had—but no matter. I am—as I am (this to the bailiffs), and will pay the money in three days, upon my honor as an officer and a gentleman. Knowing what you now know, will you quit this house?"

"The other gentleman don't feel inclined to put his name to the cheque, too, does he?" asked the sheriff's officer.

"I object—upon principle," replied the other gentleman, loftily.

"Very well," said the bailiff, pouching his pocket-book. "You ain't got no call to come with us (this to Stevie) without you like. Only as you are going to London, you call to-morrow morning on Messrs. Fuddle and Snap, 287 A, Bickersbury; have a talk with them, and that'll settle it."

Several times during this conversation, Sir George had tried to break in, and had been prevented by a gesture from Stevie. Now he could no longer be restrained—

"It shall not be!" he cried, "I will not have it! My noble—noble boy—my own true hearted Stevie! I will not owe this to you. Take your hard-earned savings—the earnings of your blood! Never! I will rot in prison first. Give him back that cheque. Take me with you now! I am ready. And you," he exclaimed, turning towards his second son, with flashing eyes, "shame upon you for standing by and consenting to such a sacrifice! I will not accept it! Let me go, I say. Stevie, let me go—let me go—let me go!" and he struggled towards the door through which the bailiffs were passing.

"Calm yourself, Sir," said Stephen, restraining and gently forcing his father into an arm-chair. "There has been no sacrifice. Mother, pray go to your guests, and then no one need know what has happened. Francis, I think you had better leave us too."

"Allow me to explain, though, that what I observed just now, about—"

"Oh, never mind what you observed," rejoined Stephen, wearily.

"But I must say that you have acted very liberally; and as you are not a rich man, I shall advise my mother that—"

"Spare your advice," said Stephen, in his sternest tone. "I tell you, plainly, brother, that but for your advice, and the influence—gained I know not how—which gives it weight, this house might be the happy home it once was when—when—"

"When *your* influence prevailed, I suppose you would say," retorted "dearest Francis," with his best sneer.

Was it because Lady Tremlett, who had left the room at Stephen's request, had overheard his words from the passage, that the moment Francis had passed her, she came running back in tears, and threw herself into her step-son's arms, sobbing like a child?

Gently he disengaged himself from her

embrace, and led her to the door; kissed her on the forehead in his old tender, protecting way, and returned to where his father sat, with his face buried in his hands.

For some time they remained there in silence — the Baronet pondering painfully over what had passed, and Stephen, bowed down with sorrow for what had got to be said. At last the former started from the chair and exclaimed —

“ Let me go with you to London, Stevie. Let me try and manage this miserable business my own way. I have pulled through so much already. I can pull through it all, if they will but give me time; and they will; they will, indeed, Stevie! They have had me arrested here because they thought that Fran — that — that the money would be paid. Take me with you; say you will, Stevie! ”

“ Stevie shook his head.

“ Only for a little time — a day or two. Don’t leave me alone here, Stevie — don’t! I cannot bear to be left alone. Let me go with you for a little time, until it has blown over.”

“ It cannot be. But for this mischance we two should not have met again. As it is we must part — perhaps forever.”

“ In Heaven’s name, why? ” cried the Baronet, aghast.

“ When I tell you, ” replied Stephen, solemnly, “ that I know what reason took you to Westborough — whom you went there to see, and what you — what happened; your own heart will tell you why.”

“ My God, Stevie! ” his father gasped, turning absolutely livid with consternation and terror. “ My God! — you will not betray me? ”

“ Betray you! No! But beware; there are those who, in spite of my utmost efforts, have gained a clue to the secret which at present is locked in my breast.”

The Baronet groaned aloud.

“ The time will come when they will know all that I know — perhaps more! Happily for you, I am able to follow their movements, and the moment you are in danger I will warn you. I can do no more. Then you can only find safety in flight.”

“ But where? — how? — I — I — ”

“ I will provide the means. Almost the last breath of your victim was spent in a prayer that you might escape the punishment which this world awards to your crime; provided — mark me well! — that justice be done where it is due.”

“ You mean to the child. It shall be —

it shall be! But, oh! Stevie, I have lost all clue to her. I have, indeed! ”

“ When and where did you see her last? ”

“ I have never seen her — never. I had a clue once, but — and now she is lost! — lost! — lost! — lost! ” and the Baronet wrung his hands at every repetition of the word.

“ Be it my task to find her, then, ” said Stephen; “ and from henceforward I devote myself to it, and to it alone.”

“ But you forgive me — say you forgive me, Stevie? ”

“ God help me, I cannot. It was so base — so treacherous.”

“ It was, it was; but oh, Stevie! if you knew all! ”

“ I know enough — too much. No more need be said. You may escape its consequences in this life; pray to Heaven that it may be pardoned there.”

“ No! no! no! Stevie, you must not go thus, ” cried his father, seizing upon him in a frenzy of grief, as he turned to quit the chamber; “ you cannot have the heart to leave me with this fresh horror on my head? ”

“ I must.”

“ You will return soon — very soon. Stevie, you will come back to us again? ”

“ Never.”

“ Oh, recall that word — that bitter, cruel word. Oh, Stevie, my son! my only stay! — my hope! — my loving, noble son! — my son! — my son!! ” and Sir George Tremlett — the tears streaming down his cheeks, fell upon Stephen’s neck, and sobbed and implored him to stay — to return, in vain.

“ Father, ” he said, “ you have well-nigh broken my heart. Do not add to my pain by useless supplications, which must be rejected. I have a duty to perform towards the living and the dead. The very day this is completed I shall return to India — would to God I had never left it. I came home — it seems only a few days ago — full of love for you all — full of I cannot say what happy anticipations. You all know how they have been realized. If I had never met you at Westborough — if I had never learnt the secret of that darkened room ” — the Baronet started — “ could this be any longer a home for me? You are silent. It was only the other day that you bade me leave it for my own peace of mind. How much more am I bound to quit it now? God in his infinite mercy bless you all. God turn your hearts more to him, and to each other. Farewell! ”

So saying Stephen turned, and without giving another look towards where his father had sunk on his knees — crushed and speechless — slowly left the room.

In the hall he had left a small bag, in which he had packed what he required for his journey. This he seized, and hurrying out of a side-door, was making his way through the shrubbery towards the park gates, when he heard a quick step behind him; and his own name called out faintly. He looked back and saw that his stepmother was following him.

"Oh, I am so glad I have caught you. Are you going now?" she panted, all out of breath.

"I am."

"What? — all alone — on foot?"

"I prefer to walk to the station."

"See here," said My Lady, looking round her nervously, and trying to force a roll of bank-notes into his hand; "see, see — take them! You have been so good — so generous; take them — but don't tell Francis."

"Dear Mammie," replied Stevie, with his sad sweet smile, rejecting the proffered gift, "let us forget about this weary money. I do not need your help. Let me go on in my own way."

"And you will very soon return, Stevie, won't you? — and we will try and be happy together, as before."

Stevie pressed her hand in silence, and turned his face aside.

"Only look at those dark clouds that are flying up yonder," she added. "I am sure there will be a dreadful storm. Do let me order one of the carriages for you. Francis will lend you his brougham — he said he would, indeed he did, just now."

"Never mind the clouds," Stevie replied, "they will not hurt me. Kiss me, Mammie, dear. Be kind to my father. Once more. Have I hurt you? No! God bless you, and good-by."

And so he left her, and ran on into the storm which was darkening over his path.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET.

"Now, I tell you what it is, Sir," said Mr. Lagger to Stephen, when true to their appointment they met on the platform of the Derby Railway Station; "let's you and me take a little country walk, and talk

this 'ere matter over quietly. It's done raining now, and the fields 'ill be mighty pleasant."

"Wouldn't it be better to engage a private room in the hotel?"

"Beggin' your pardon, Sir, I don't like ho-tels. Private rooms in such-like places ain't always private. Give me the open air for business where two's company and three's none."

Stephen made no further objection and forth they saillied, passed through the town and its outskirts, struck into the meadows, and soon arrived at a spot sufficiently lonely for their purpose.

"Now, Sir," said the detective, "if you'll set yourself down on that there bank, I'll squat on this here stump; and if you sees any one coming along the path to the right, you say 'Hem'; and if I sees any one coming along the path to the left, I say 'Hem'; and when this person passes us I shall say — pretty loud — 'But my friend can't give more than five-and-twenty shillings a quarter for it,' to which you must reply — 'Oh, he can't, can't he?; whereby this here person won't be much the wiser about what we're really saying."

Stephen could not help smiling at this quaint precaution, and seated himself as the detective had suggested.

"You ain't repented having trusted me, Captain Frankland, eh?" he asked.

"Before I answer that question," said Stephen, "you must tell me what brought you to Tremlett Towers, and why you entered that room?"

"To tell you plain truth, Sir, you've bin watched ever since the inquest. I've bin a watching you myself ever since you left the Convent at Hull."

"How do you know I was there?" asked Stephen, sharply.

"I know it — that's enough; and I know what you went there to find out — that's more! Lord bless you, Captain, I sees through all this like glass. Mr. Brandon sez to you, sez he, 'There's papers at Mangerton Chase hid away in such and such a place; but he — he didn't make you clearly understand where Mangerton Chase is — or rather where it isn't — for it's Tremlett Towers now. You set to work to find it out, and as soon as I knew your little game, I sez to myself, sez I, 'here's a bound,' — begging your pardon — 'as is on the scent. Stick to his heels Lagger, my man, and you won't go far out of the way!' If I hadn't seen you get into that room, I should still have had my eye on you. That's why I got that stupid old Crowner to let you down so

easy at the inquest. Why, we might have quodded you for not telling all you knew — all what Mr. Brandron told you; but, thinks I, 'no, give him time and he'll tell us everything, — and so you have.'

"I have told you nothing, man! what do you mean?"

"There's ways of telling a thing without talking about it. Come, come, Captain; if you and I had not met now, we should have run against one another some day, and then somebody would have been hurted. Let's work this business out together, — you for your purpose, I for mine. You can't prevent my getting along, and I can help you. I ax you agin, — you ain't repented having trusted me, eh?"

"Upon the whole, No," replied Stephen, thoughtfully.

"That's right, — that's as it should be. How about these here papers, have you got them with you?"

"I have. They are here." And Stephen produced the bundle just as he had fastened it up with the detective the night before.

"Ha, all right! Now, Sir, if you don't mind reading those letters out slowly. They're very nicely composed, they are. I've bin a-thinking over them almost all night, and I've pretty nigh made plain English out of 'em. There's nothing like hearing a thing read, though, to draw the broth out of it. Just begin at the beginning, will you, Sir?"

Stephen assented. The paper was yellow with age and dust, and eaten through here and there by rats; moreover, the writing was blotted in places, as Stephen thought, by tears. I give them as they were, at last, deciphered, and the words in italics are such as had to be guessed at by help of the context.

"Tuesday.

"Mr. Howell presents his compliments to Miss Bruce, and begs to send for her *perusal* the books he mentioned this morning, and which she expressed a wish to have."

No date.

"MY DEAR MISS BRUCE,

"How could you have imagined that you had offended me? You ask me to be perfectly candid, and I will be so. I have never passed pleasanter hours than those which have been spent in *your house*, but there was that in *your father's manner* towards me which makes me fear that I am not so welcome as I used to be. I am

not conscious of having offended him in any way. What have I done? Pray *make my peace*. I enclose the tickets that will pass you through the lines at the Review on Thursday, if you *should like* to go.

"Yours faithfully,
"GEORGE HOWELL.

"P. S. — I suppose I ought to thank you for returning the books, but I should have been much more grateful if *you had* designed to accept *them* from me, as I hoped you would."

"Saturday.

"Will I come to your cousin's ball? Wont I? It was Mrs. Chappell who told me that you thought you had offended me. Am I to suppose that this invitation is meant as a sort of peace-offering from your family? What can I have done, though, to provoke hostilities, and make one *requisite*, I have no more idea than the man in the moon. Shall you go early? Will you keep a dance or two *disengaged* for me? Signify your royal pleasure in this behalf by coming without a bouquet. You will *find one* for you in the lady's room. Who is this Mr. Brandron?"

"Yours,
"G. H."

"Wednesday night.

"MY OWN BELOVED,

"I cannot sleep, I cannot rest with those ecstatic words ringing in my ear. You *love* me? You have said so, Mary, with your own sweet lips, — or is it a dream? Oh, let me hear them again! Now that I know that you are mine, — mine, Mary, forever, in spite of all the world; I cannot live a day *without seeing* you, I think, darling. How impossible it was for *me* to express one tithe of my love, — to thank you, my glorious! brave! beautiful one! for the inestimable gift of your own, in all that crowd! Be in the Square garden to-day at twelve, or any time. I will wait all day to see you. I have made great friends with Sarah, and *she will give* you this. We must be very careful now, till something can be settled.

"Your own ever loving
"GEORGIE."

"To-morrow, dearest, same time and place. I met your father just now in Regent Street, and got nothing but black looks. *Can he suspect?*"

"MY OWN DARLING MARY,

"I regret as much as you do the *necessity* which compels us to deceive your family, and, consequently, my own. But *what can I do?* Were I to call on your father and ask him to sanction our engagement, he would set himself up in his foolish pride, give me a long lecture about unequal marriages, show me the door, more or less politely, and *forbid you* to see or communicate with me again. As it is, he does not forbid you to do so, and I do not see that *you are* at all bound to tell him that we meet daily, — alas! naughty girl! not daily. Why did *you not come* yesterday? I wandered up and down the banks of the Serpentine, waiting for you, till really the policeman looked as though he thought I was going to run away with the bridge, or commit suicide. No such nonsense. I have something to live for now. And so you still preserve that faded bouquet? Don't keep faded flowers, bright one: come for fresh ones every day. I — jealous of old Brandron! Nonsense!

"Your own
"GEORGIE."

"OH, YOU DEAR LITTLE GOOSE!"

"The idea of fretting about such a proposition. Accept at once, but not too eagerly, for *fear* they may suspect. Say that you are tired of the gayeties of the season, and want country air. I have a friend who lives among the Derbyshire wilds, not more than a few miles from Macclesfield, and consequently well within lover's distance of your aunt's home. Mary, darling, he is a clergyman, the best fellow in the world, and the *congregation* of his little out-of-the-way church does not count a dozen. He has often asked me to go and stay with him, and — but I must *speak* what I have in my mind. I cannot write it, it would frighten you, — and yet it is not frightful, darling. Accept at once. God bless you my love! — my life! — my wife that shall be.

"Craigsleigh.

"Everything is arranged. Richard will perform the ceremony. Be at the brook at which we parted last at 10 on Monday. Bring Susan, or Sarah, whichever her name is, — I mean Alston, — that is, if you think that you can really trust her.

"Jersey.

"MY OWN BELOVED WIFE,

"I find to my sorrow that *I shall* be detained here *much longer* than I supposed.

You ask me if I did not feel guilty during those two days *which intervened* between your departure from Craigsleigh and *your arrival* at home? Guilty of what? Of spending the happiest hours of my life in the *company* of the best, the most beautiful, and the dearest of little wives? 'Not guilty, my Lady, upon my honor,' as my Lord Rossthorne *would say*. I wish you were here. You have no idea what a beautiful island this is, or how much more lovely it would be in my eyes if your dear presence were here to *add to the charm* of the scene!

"Have you heard of Richard's good luck? The *appointment* is worth £1,000 a year, and I hear that the climate is not at all unwholesome.

"I cannot help thinking that you are wrong, — oh, *sapient wifey!* — in not letting me have it out with your father before I left; but no more of this till we meet again, which must be very shortly. Be very careful, dear, with that fellow, Brandron. I cannot make him out. Is he a spy? I hate his quiet stealthy manner, and have often caught him watching you in a way that used to make me savage. I was jealous of him, Mary, as I was of *any one who* was permitted to come near you, when I, who loved you, — who had won your love, — was an exile *from your home*. Of course I am not *jealous* of him *now*, only be careful. We must not be found out. We must take the initiative and disclose all; and the sooner this *takes place* the better pleased will be

"Your ever loving husband,
"GEORGIE."

"Jersey.

"MY BELOVED WIFE,

"I seize an *opportunity* of replying to your letter within an hour after its receipt. The news you send delights me beyond expression. We *must* make our marriage public now. But oh, you wicked wife! why did you not tell me before? The slightest shade of blame must *not fall on* your honor, or on our little child's good name. I have been bandied about here from pillar to post, and all my applications for release have been disregarded. There must be some influence at work, somewhere, against me. I shall leave directly, at any risk, and *be with you* almost as soon as my letter. Still, should anything happen, on no *account* *brave* your father's anger alone. Let me bear the brunt of it, and if by any chance your *condition* should be discovered before I can arrive, fly at once to Mangerton Chase.

No one lives there now, and the entire house is *at my disposal*. Wait there, — take Susan, — Sarah, I mean, with you, — till I come. I have no time to add more. That God may guide and watch over you, beloved wife, is the incessant prayer of your proud, happy, and ever loving husband,

GEORGIE."

"I certify that I was present in the chapel a where my mistress, Miss Mary Bruce, only daugh married by licence to Mr. George Howell, as this from the Register will prove. I say that she of grief, being deserted by her husband and acc other, falsely, of having given birth to an illegit In truth, it was born in lawful wedlock, on the sec January.

"And I say that this child was taken away sister Mary to be nursed. And further, I de be lost or the proofs of its legitimacy be destr our will, the person who does this crime is has already tried to bribe us to do so may happen to me this is true and m me God.

(Witness)

"SUSAN — sometimes called SARAH — ALSTON.
"JOHN EVERETT BRANDON."

"Now these here letters," said Mr. Lag- ger, when Stephen had concluded, "is very pretty writing, but what do they come to when they're biled and peeled? Shall I tell you?"

"By all means. Pray go on."

"They comes to this. The gentleman as writes from Jersey, — *Hem!* — being a friend of mine, says that he won't give more than five-and-twenty shillings a quar- ter for it. Don't you see?"

— — —

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT MR. LAGGER THOUGHT ABOUT THE LETTERS, AND HOW HE VISITED CRAIGSLEIGH CHAPEL.

THE wayfarer whose appearance had drawn from Mr. Lagger the preconcerted signal and observation, was a wretched, ragged, hungry-looking tramp; who slunk along slowly, with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes upon the ground, as though he had left nothing behind him, had nothing to hope for at his journey's end, and nothing to do from one day to another, but slink onward — here and there — towards that somewhere where his weary pilgrimage should end in a pauper's grave. There was such an appearance of dejection and

This was the last of the letters.

From a paper in which the marriage certificate was folded, Stephen Frankland next read as follows, but the right hand edge was so gnawed by the rats that the words it contained were illegible.

hopelessness in the fellow's manner as he approached and climbed the stile, that our soft-hearted Stevie's hand stole involun- tarily towards his purse, from whence he took a small coin, in anticipation of an appeal to his charity. But no such an appeal was made; on the contrary, when the tramp came near to the spot where Stevie and the detective sat, he struck across the meadow so as to avoid them, and rejoined the path by a *detour*.

"Humph!" reflected Mr. Sampson Lag- ger, watching the retreating figure with a professional eye, "I shouldn't wonder if somebody wanted *you*. You've got the 'I've-been-and-gone-and-done-it-and-everybody-as-sees-me-knows-it' look in your eyes, my fine fellow — that's about what *you've* got! But, I say, Captain, he added, turning to Stephen, "you missed your cue. When I sez, 'He won't give more than five-and-twenty shillings a bushel for it,' you should have re-plied 'Oh, he won't, won't he?' according to agreement. Don't you forget that again, now, next time as anybody comes along, and I say 'Humph!'"

"Well, well, well!" replied Stevie im- patiently, "but you were going to tell me what you deduced from the letters I have just read."

"What I de-duce from them there letters is — but where's the marriage certificate you had in your hand last night when I came in up yonder?"

Stephen handed it, and the detective examined what remained decipherable of its contents carefully. I say "what remained decipherable," because, like the paper in which it was folded, the extremity of the right-hand side was more or less eaten away by rats. In this mutilated shape it remained as follows:—

1835 <i>Marriage Solemnised in the District Church of Craig in the Parish of Exington, in the County of Derby</i>					
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profes.
57	11. June 1835	George Howell Mary Bruce	of full age of full age	Spinster	

"Ah!" said Lagger, when he had turned it over and over after the manner of persons who don't exactly make out what they read—"ah! and if them there cursed rats had taken counsel's opinion on the matter, they couldn't have gnawed it better; but, Lord! what does it matter? We only havé to go to Craigsleigh Chapel to see the original."

"The original!"

"Of course; this 'ere's only a copy. I went to the parish church here this afternoon before you arrived, just to see what particulars a marriage certificate as had not been grubbed by rats should give, and I find that it will tell us, over and above what is set down here, the 'condition' of the bridegroom—that is, whether he was a bachelor or a widower at the time of this marriage—his rank or profession, his place of residence (but that we know), the surname of the father or mother of the bride, and *their* rank or profession. Bruce ain't an uncommon name, no more ain't Howell—that is, if so be as his name really *was* Howell."

"Why should you doubt it?" asked Stephen.

"I'll tell you by-and-by—everything in its turn. I say these ain't uncommon names, but when we get a clue to the father of the young lady—if so be as she *was* a young lady—and know what he was, and where he lived, and the profes-

sion of this 'ere George Howell, why that's business, that is."

"And we can find out all this at the church?"

"In the registry book. We can go over there in the morning. You ain't in a particular hurry to get to London, are you, Captain?"

"I am, indeed; I have an appointment—at least, I must see some one on a matter of considerable importance to-morrow."

"Well, then, I'll go alone, and I'll bring you a faithful copy of what I find. Will that do?"

Stephen assented, determining in his own mind that as soon as he had arranged his father's affairs with Messrs. Puddle and Snap, he would run down to Craigsleigh and make inquiries for himself.

"That's settled, then," said Mr. Lagger. "I'm going to be all fair and above-board with you, Captain, in this affair; all through 'cordin' to contract. So now I'll tell you what I de-due from these 'ere love-letters.

"If it hadn't bin for what Sarah Alston sez just at the last, I should 'a come to a different conclusion; but settin' down what she sez as truth, if George Howell was to come to me, and say, 'Well, now, Mr. Lagger, what do you think of me?' I should up and re-ply, 'Mr. Howell—if so be as your name *is* Howell—I think it

belongs to a blackguard, that's what I think."

"But why—why so?" demanded Stephen impatiently.

"What does he do?" asked the detective, in a severe and judicial tone. "He becomes beknown to Mary Bruce. He gets talking poetry and sich-like to her—for I'll be bound that them books he lent her was poetry books—and visits at her house very often—so often that the governor, he cuts up grumpy. Why does he cut up grumpy? Because he sees Master Georgia a-spooning his daughter. Who is Master Georgie? He sends tickets to see a review, so I'm in-clined to think he's a officer in the army; and when you finds a young fellow prancing about in scarlet and gold before a gal in Hyde Park in the daytime, and a-reading poetry books with her in the evenings, and when this young gal goes and tells a friend that this young man is 'offended' with her because he does not come to see her as often as he used, why there's something up between them as *ought* to end in church on a week-day. Why shouldn't it end in church, both parties being agreeable? Because the governor of the young lady won't have it—that's why! And why won't the governor have it? Because there's a disparity of rank between them; that's what 'Georgie' means when he sez, 'Your father, sez he, 'will preach to me about "unequal marriages."'" At first," continued Mr. Lagger, in a reflective tone, "I thought that the—the—that what ain't equal, you know—"

"The inequality."

"That's the very word! I thought the in-equality was on the gentleman's side, but if he had married into a rich or a distinguished fam'ly he'd never have deserted his wife as he did."

"He writes of her father's *pride*," suggested Stephen.

"Poor chaps are proud—prouder than rich ones in some things," replied Lagger. "I may be wrong, but I fancy this Howell was a man of po-sition in the world, and Miss Bruce a young lady who wouldn't be his mistress, and whom he hadn't the pluck to acknowledge as his wife. Well, he goes to this 'ere ball they mentions, and there he speaks his mind. He gives her a bookay of flowers, and he talks to her like one of his own poetry books; and she—poor little thing!—she locks up the fine flowers in her box, and the fine words in her heart, and goes out to meet him every day unbeknown to the governor, and frets and worries till he sez, sez the governor,

'You're a-fretting and a-worrying after that seller. You sha'n't stop any longer in London. You shall go and live with your aunt down in Derbyshire—that's what you shall do.' Now what happens when she goes down to live with her aunt is as clear as mud in a wine-glass. They get married—secretly. Then, when it's time for her to go home again, he meets her on the road, and they stop a day or two at Leamington."

"How can you tell that?"

"This here *Bible*," answered Lagger, producing the book which had been found in the bundle with the papers, "was bought there; look at the ticket pasted in the cover!—'Sold by Smith, Bookseller, Leamington.' I should not wonder, now, if they bought two—one for him to give to her, and one for her to give to him. This is what he gave to her, and he's bin and wrote in it, 'To my wife, 2nd July, 1835; but he don't sign his name. Not he! He knows better. Afterwards she goes home to her governor, and Master Georgie cuts away *somewhere*."

"To Guernsey. Do not let us lose sight of facts in forming conjectures," said Stephen. "Let us not forget that the father of the child that was born at Mangerton Chase, in the month of April, 1836, was living in Guernsey and Jersey during the months of December, 1835, and up to the 20th of the following February."

"Humph! leastwise he makes belief to have bin there."

"Why, man, he describes the scenery of the islands, and his letters are dated from thence."

"How comes it, then, that there's no direction? and more—no post-mark on any of 'em?"

"Because they are sent by a private hand," replied Stephen, a little too eagerly, for he knew well that Sir George Tremlett—then Frankland—was in England at the dates mentioned. "Observe how that letter from Jersey commences, 'I seize this opportunity,' &c., &c. This shows that it was sent by hand; and as to the others—"

"Well, what of them?"

"They may have been sent by post, but under cover, to some person whom he could trust to deliver them into the hands of his wife. It is impossible to doubt that he was where he represents himself to have been."

"Now that's as it should be," said Mr. Lagger, looking complacently at Stephen, with one eye shut, and his head on one side, much as a respectable magpie would

behold the well-directed attentions of his son and heir towards a silver fork which had fallen in his way, "that's as it should be ! I likes to see a gentleman sharp. I likes to see people as has cut their eye-teeth a-using on 'em. Why, if you was a counsellor at the Old Bailey, a-trying to make out a halabi, you couldn't be sharper."

The word *alibi* jarred upon Stephen's ear, though it was strictly in harmony with the thought which was uppermost in his mind. He forced a laugh, and replied,—

" What possible interest can I have in making out that he was in one place more than another ? I do not know the man."

" Never heard tell of him ? "

" Never."

" And you don't know how he come to send his wife to Mangerton Chase ? "

" No."

" Then I'll tell you," said the detective. " You'll excuse me, but I've been pretty busy with your family affairs for the last fortnight, and I know as much about them as most people."

Stephen flushed, and bit his lip.

" You see, Captain," Lagger continued, " knowing that you was up to some little game, I made my investigations with a view of finding out what it was likely to be. And knowing, as I did, that poor Mr. Brandron left England a little more than twenty years ago, and con-cluding that whatever happened to rile him like, took place about that time, I naturally set to work to find out what your people was a-doing just then. You couldn't have bin up to mischief, leastwise this sort of mischief, then ; for you was a little curly-headed boy, you was ; and an out-and-out little cock-o'-wax too, I'll be bound." This compliment did not soften the frown which was darkening over Stevie's brow. " Go on," he said curtly ; " never mind what I was."

" Well — not to mince matters — your governor Sir George, he was up a tree just then — very high up a tree he was. My ! what a fine gentleman he was while the money lasted, and before these mines went to the bad ! "

" You may spare me all this."

" Very good ; well then, being hard up, why, he let his house and land to Lord — but there ain't no good mentioning names. He let it to a fam'ly as went to the bad — all on 'em — horse, foot, and dragoons soon afterwards, and rum scenes went on in Mangerton Chase while they had it, I can tell you. They had to bolt in the autumn of 1835. They went up a tree too — they did ! and never come down again. It

wasn't till some time after Sir George's second marriage, when they built that fine front part, that any of your family lived down yonder."

" Consequently, we know nothing of this George Howell."

" Ex-actly ; but putting this and that together, I shouldn't wonder if it was that racketty young lord's brother, or else one of his harem-scarem friends, who married this poor young lady. She, naturally enough, ran off to the place he named, when she could no longer conceal her secret, and he, like a villain, absconded abroad with the rest on 'em, leaving her to die, may be of grief."

" You think she is dead, then ? "

" Sartin. That letter which we found at Westborough — the one from this Susan, or Sarah what-do-you-call-her, sez so."

" But the child is alive ! "

" Not a doubt of it, and now we comes to business. Who has an interest in keeping this marriage dark, except this 'ere un-natural parent, who — "

" Stop one moment. Why should he do so ? It is not as though his wife were alive, and he were a rich man. He le-vanted from his creditors, and has long been free to marry again. Why should he not acknowledge the child ? "

" Ah ! there's the pinch. *Some* one has an interest in concealing its parentage. You can't get over that."

" No ; and that *some one* was in England — at Mangerton Chase — soon after its birth," mused Stephen, carried away, in spite of himself, by the interest which these inquiries aroused.

" Oh, Mr. Brandron said so, did he ? " asked the detective quickly.

" No — yes ; that is, ah — well, he did not say so in as many words, but I gather the fact from the letter you have already referred to — "

" And which corroborates my idea about his being a great man."

" Just now you set him down as an absconding spendthrift ! "

" Look you here, Captain Frankland, I don't disguise it from you that I'm a-guessing in the dark. It may be that he was one of them young scamps — it *must* be that it was *some one* connected with 'em, else how could he get the run of Mangerton Chase ? Now a young nobleman may be ruined, and come round all right again by a good marriage or what-not, and a ready-made child might be a spoke in his wheel in after-life. That this child is a spoke in *some one's* wheel is plain, or Mr. Brandron would never have been sent to

India, and might have been alive to this day. P'raps it was a friend — may be one of them kind friends who used to play lansquinet and blind hookey with the young lord and his brother all night, when they lived over yonder — perhaps it wasn't. But this 'ere is not a Christmas riddle as has got to be *guessed*. It's a puzzle as has to be worked out by you and me in different ways. I've got to put the murderer of John Everett Brandon into the dock, and to hunt up such evidence against him, as will make a jury say he's guilty. What happens to him afterwards is no affair of mine. You've got to find this 'ere child — a young man or woman by this time, and see that it has its rights. It ain't a lively look-out for it, though," mused the detective, "to pick up its regulars off its father's gallows."

"I don't see what right you have to assume his guilt," said Stephen angrily; "some relation of the mother might be equally interested in suppressing the marriage."

"Might be," replied the detective, rising; "we shall see in good time. Meanwhile it seems to me, Captain, as we ought to hunt in couples."

"You have promised me your assistance, and so of course you will require money —"

"Not a sixpence. What I does, I does professionally, only I communicates unprofessionally with you 'cordin' to contract. Where's your house of call in London?"

"East India Club — but no, don't call there. I will leave a letter for you, whenever you please, stating an address where you can see me always."

"Good; send your letter to care of Mrs. Wantley, Little Union Street, Boro'."

Stephen took down the address in his note-book carefully; packed up the letters and Bible, and, still accompanied by Lagger, returned to the Derby Railway Station, and took the mail train for London, whilst the detective remained, for the purpose of going, on the next morning, to Buxton, to search the registers of the district church at Craigsleigh. Before he left Derby, however, he provided himself with a butterfly net, and a pair of green spectacles; and when he made his appearance at the little parsonage, it was as an elderly gentleman of entomological tastes, who who had lost his way on the hills, and was so tired as to be obliged to ask permission to rest himself there for a while.

Like Sir George Tremlett, you see, he had a roundabout way of doing things.

But whatever may have been his original plan for gaining the information which he

desired, it was modified by a circumstance which occurred soon after his arrival at the little parsonage.

I think that one of the principal causes of that reserve and surliness which Continentals lay to the charge of us Britons, is our inability to judge, by external appearances, of the station, profession, tastes, or habits of those with whom we are thrown in contact. Modern fashion, the disappearance of special costumes, and the cheapness of gentlemanly apparel, make us all externally alike, so that the person whom we encounter on the railway or steamboat, or who occupies the next table to us in the hotel or club, may be a duke or a dust-contractor, a Rothschild or a Redpath, a Peabody or a pickpocket, for anything that we can tell; and so we hold our tongues respectively, and glare at each other in mutual distrust. But let one of us have a fishing-rod, or a cricket-bat in his hand, a hunting-coat on his back, or a sketch-book amongst his luggage, and if the other is not a snob, we shall get into conversation in ten minutes, because there is one subject, clearly indicated, upon which we can begin to talk. Thus it was with Mr. Lagger and Mr. Thomas, the incumbent of Craigsleigh. The butterfly net, carried by the former, was their introduction.

"And so," said the clergyman, "you're an entomologist?"

"A what, Sir?"

"An entomologist."

"Can't say that I am, Sir," replied the detective gravely. "To tell truth, I was brought up in the muffin and crumpet line, and when I growed up I went into the po-lice."

"I meant to ask you if you were fond of the study of insect life," said the clergyman, with a smile; "they call people who are, entomologists."

"Now, do they really!" rejoined Mr. Lagger, in a triumphant tone. "Lord, what fine things a man may be without knowing! But there ain't no *study* about it with me — leastwise what gentlemen like you calls 'study.' You see I've bin kep' pretty close to the collar all my life in London, and when a man re-tires into private life, he must give his mind up to something, else I'm blowed — asking your riverence's pardon — if his mind won't give *him* up."

"You are quite right."

"Some," continued the detective thoughtfully, "gives it up to skittles, and some to raising green gooseberries out of season, and some goes into the private inquiry

line. I'm very partial to the country, because I've seen so little on it. Why, bless my soul ! there ain't a bush, or a rock, or a tuft of fuz hereabout as is not full of curiosities for such as me ; and there ain't no harm, is there, Sir, in liking to look at things, and to turn 'em over, even though you don't know nothing about them skientifically ? ”

One glance through the parsonage windows had shown this fox that Mr. Thomas was a naturalist ; and having struck the right chord, harmony was instantly established between them. The good clergyman was only too glad to find an auditor for discoveries upon his favorite hobby, and had not the faintest notion that it was being converted into a pump, through which most of the information which his disciple required flowed freely. Thus did Mr. Lagger become aware that the predecessor of his instructor was the Rev. Richard Stourton, who had been appointed Bishop of Scalptown, somewhere on the east coast of Africa ; that his clerk — poor old man ! — had died last Christmas, and had been succeeded by a very superior young person, who had been recommended by some charitable people in London. That “ The Elms,” a neighboring mansion, was formerly occupied by a Mrs. Chappel, who, however, had not lived there since Mr. Thomas's arrival. That very few marriages took place in the little church ; so few, that all which the present incumbent had celebrated did not half fill one registry book. That this volume was in use in Mr. Stourton's time, but that there were others which the new clerk had discovered in shocking bad condition, huddled away in a vault, and which he had removed to his own lodgings in a neighboring farmhouse. Very warm in praise of this new clerk was Mr. Thomas, and why so well-spoken and fairly-educated a person should be content to fill so humble a position in that out-of-the-way spot, the good gentleman could not think.

There were those who asked the self-same question respecting the new clerk's master.

Between each stroke of the pump, Mr. Lagger craftily led his entertainer back amongst the ferns and zoophites in which he took delight, plunged him deep into the old red sandstone, where his choicest treasures had lain hidden, and, after allowing him to revel there for a short space, drew him off imperceptibly into the shallower regions in which the facts that the detective desired to ascertain were embalmed. And so pleasant was their converse, that

Mr. Thomas forgot all about some letters of importance which he had to write before the lad who carried the post-bag to Macclesfield should arrive. Having suddenly remembered this obligation, he begged Lagger to excuse him ; “ And, oh ! by the by,” he said, “ of course you'd like to see the church (there is a general but harmless mania amongst clergymen that everybody wants to see their church) ; so I'll send for Ferrers — my clerk, you know, and he will show you over it. If you will not mind waiting in the other room, he will be with you in a few minutes. His school is close at hand, and it is just time for him to break up for the day.”

So the detective left Mr. Thomas to his letters, and retired to the apartment indicated, from the window of which he could see down the lane towards the farmhouse in which the new clerk lived, and had set up his village-school. He saw the messenger run down ; then came a shout, and a rush of smock-frocked urchins up the path, and after them, proceeding more leisurely, the new clerk, swinging the heavy keys of the church in his hand, and looking hot and tired, but still having that indescribable *something* in his mien which belongs to a man who has put his heart into an honest day's work, and has done it well. Mr. Thomas was quite right. Ferrers did not look the sort of young man who would be content with £25 a year as a parish clerk, and the weekly pence of the little hedge-side school. But the instant that he entered the room where the detective was waiting, a change, awful to behold, came over him, and he fell on his knees, as if struck down by a blow.

“ My God ! my God ! ” he groaned, “ you have come to ruin me. Oh, it is cruel, cruel ! Have I not been punished enough ? ”

Mr. Lagger started from his chair, and though, as we are aware, not given to be taken aback, was certainly not a little surprised by this strange appeal. He quickly made a rough guess at the state of affairs.

“ Now don't you get talking anyhow, like that,” he said roughly. “ That there sort of gammon won't do you no good, and so I tell you. Get up ! ”

The new clerk rose, and eyed him suddenly, trembling the while in every limb. “ And so,” continued Mr. Lagger, “ you call yourself Ferrers ! What next ? ”

“ I do not deny that the name is a feigned one,” replied the clerk. “ What could I do ? Would any one give me employment under that which I have disgraced ? ”

"Then you don't deny that you are—"

"I deny nothing. Why should I? Did I not plead guilty at the trial?"

"In course! — that's about the only sensible thing you done. Why the evidence was conclusive, and they'd have hit you if you'd a' had the Lord Chancellor to defend you, and the Archbishop of Canterbury as a witness to character."

"I was driven to it by sheer hunger. Laxton lied when he said his firm discharged me because my accounts were not properly rendered;" and the new clerk's pale face flushed, and his eyes brightened, at the recollection of this injury. "They discharged me because — no matter now, but it was not for fraud. I tell you I was starving, but with hope of employment — mind that! It was promised, and when I drew that bill of exchange, I had every reason to suppose I should have been able to meet it before it became due, and never meant to defraud a soul."

"So everybody says when they commit forgery."

"Well, be it so," replied the new clerk wearily. "I have committed a crime and I have suffered for it. Is that not enough?"

"And a pretty fellow you are to set up for a parson's clerk, and get them innocent kids grown up to *your* teaching. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No; I am getting a living — poor as it is — honestly."

"Under a false name!"

"Yes — and why? Because you, and such as you, never give a wretch who has once fallen, a chance of recovery. In spite of all my precautions, you have hunted me out here, just as you hunted me out before. You will betray my wretched secret to Mr. Thomas, and I shall be driven from a place where I am doing my duty, where I am striving to retrieve the past, where I am liked, and — perhaps respected a little; and then, if despair should drive me again — which God forbid — into sin, you will say, 'See here, this fellow is incorrigible; transport him, rid the country of a confirmed felon!' But for this cursed cruelty and injustice, I might have lived and died an honest man."

"You're just talking anyhow again," said Lagger. "Did I say I was a-going to split upon you?"

"Then why are you here?"

"That's my business," replied the detective. "I ain't one to interfere with a young man as has been in trouble, when I find him going on on the square; but I tell you plainly there's bin some hankey-pankey tricks played with church registry

books lately, and when the au-thorities find a chap as has signed other folk's name by mistake, instead of his own, on a bill of exchange, in a po-sition of trust over the legal records of honest people's marriages, — why the au-thorities likes to know how that 'ere trust is dis-charged, that's what the au-thorities likes to know."

"Well?"

"And when they finds that a chap convicted of forgery has bin and took church registry books out of their proper place, and bin a-meddling with 'em at home without anybody by to see fair play, why, the au-thorities, they likes to know what's what — and small blame to 'em for it, say I."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Ferrers, "has this been made into a charge against me? I thought I was doing a praiseworthy action! I found these books mouldering away in a most unfit place, and my sole endeavor and object has been to repair, as far as possible, the damage that has already been done, and to preserve them for the future."

"Wery well, then; you satisfy me of that, and it's all right," said Lagger, scarcely able to repress a twinkle that would come into his eye.

"But you have been speaking with Mr. Thomas, you have told him —"

"Nothing about you, and if I find all right about the books, I sha'n't tell him nothing — there now! If you likes to let out why I've come down here, why of course you can. I sha'n't. Come, none of that," the detective continued, as the new clerk sprang forward, in a paroxysm of delight and gratitude, and tried to seize his hand — "I'm a-going to do my duty, I am; you wait till that's over, and then we see about shaking hands. You come along and show me the church 'cordin' to orders, and when that's done, if there's anybody by, you sez to me, 'Will you step up to my little place,' you sez, 'and take a cup of tea, Mr. Brown? you must be dry after your long walk,' to which I shall re-ply, 'Thank you kindly, Mr. Ferrers, I will.' Then I shall ac-company you home, examine them books, and if I find them all serene — why I don't mind if I do have a cup of tea, and so I tell you. Now you go on ahead and open the doors."

"Sam Lagger," mused the detective as he passed through the parsonage garden, "it's high time you re-tired from business. Your memory ain't what it used to was, my man, or what it ought to be. If this 'ere young chap had not made a fool of hisself, and split upon hisself, you wouldn't have known him. He knew *you* sharp

enough. You've had a finger in his pie, that's clear; and not so wery long ago neither. But I'm darned if you can remember him, or his right name, or if you know any more about how he come to get into trouble, than he has been flat enough to tell you. Seems a good sort of young fellow too, though he has made a slip. Expose him to his governor! Not I."



CHAPTER XXV.

THE MARRIAGE REGISTERS.

It must be confessed that the little district church did not contain any object of interest to Mr. Lagger, with the exception of the place where the registry books had been huddled away by the old clerk, and, in his own mind, he felt perfectly convinced that it was not a safe repository for them.Appealed to, however, on this point, he could by no means admit the excuse advanced by Ferrers for their removal.

"Now you just answer me this question," he said. "Is this 'ere a Church of England Es-tablishment, or is it not?"

"Church of England, no doubt."

"Well, then, a Church of England Es-tablishment has a parson, to do what the prayer-book orders him to do, and a clerk to say A-men to what he sez, and wardens, dooly chosen, to take charge of and be responsible for this, that, and t'other, necessary for the celebration of this, that, and t'other service — that's what a Church of England Es-tablishment has. Now what are you? Are you the parson, or the clerk, or the two church-wardens of this 'ere Es-tablishment?"

"The clerk."

"Very good! Then you stick to your A-men, and let the others stick to their business."

"But I thought —"

"You thought! What call has a parish clerk got to *think*? Wait till you're a parson, or two church-wardens, and then you may think, and welcome."

"Mr. Thomas thoroughly approved of what I did."

"And what right had he to meddle with them books any more than you? Now don't you go argufying the point with me, young fellow, or you'll find yourself in the wrong box," said Mr. Lagger severely. "You've bin and com-mitted a mistake, to say the least of it. You prove to me

that you ain't bin and done *woss*, and I'm not the man to be hard upon you. Now tell me. The marriage registry book now in use — where's that?"

"In the vestry."

"How long does it go back?"

"I cannot say exactly; about twenty or thirty years."

"Well, then, you go and fetch it, for I must re-port upon 'em all. You've bin in the habit of carrying the books to your place, so no one won't notice your taking this. Cut along, and I'll wait for you outside."

This conversation had taken place at the foot of the belfry tower, in a sort of vault, below the level of the church floor, in which the bell was rung with a long rope, and where — in a sort of cupboard rough-hewn in the wall — the old books had been discovered.

Mr. Lagger found his way out again into the churchyard, where he was soon joined by the new clerk, carrying the required volume under his arm.

"That's right," said the detective; "now come along home, and let's overhaul these books while there's daylight to see what's what. There ain't no one to hear you, so you need not ask me to tea; only when we come to your lodgings, you sez to your landlord or his good lady, whichever you meets fust — sez you, 'Mr. What's-his-name, or Mrs. What's-her-name, this gentleman's an old ac-quaintance of mine (which is true, you know), and he's come to have a chat over old times.' True agin — for them registers go back to the days of our godfathers and godmothers in our baptism, and afore then."

"I have done no wrong," replied Ferrers, "and see no occasion for this secrecy and deceit."

"Wery well! — wery well! Then you bring down the books to the parsonage, and we'll have a public in-quiry; only, of course, I must tell the parson the reason why it is to be held."

Ferrers turned deadly pale again, and gnawed his nether lip till the blood trickled.

"Have it your own way," he said at last, in a half choking voice. "I am in your power. God help me!"

"You help *yourself*. God made you a reasonable being, not a pig or a idiot, that you should be *helped* along."

"Follow me, and I will do as you desire."

"Not a bit of it. Old friends just met, arter a separ-ation, don't march along in single file. You take my arm, and carry

this 'ere butterfly net; and look pleasant too — that's about how old friends should go along."

Ferrers shuddered, as he felt the grasp of the detective tighten on his arm. He conducted him down the lane in silence, and they were soon seated in the new clerk's pleasant, but homely quarters, with the heavy registers spread out upon the table.

"Before we begin this 'ere in-quiry," said Lagger, "tell me one thing. You gev a wrong name when you was took up; didn't you now?"

"No, Clarke was my right name — an honest one once."

"Clarke, eh, so it was!" said the detective, slapping his thigh. "Forgery at the Old Bailey, three years' penal servitude, Mr. Justice Wightman; I know; you'd a dozen witnesses to character, you had; but the judges, they're always down hard and heavy upon forgers. You may smash a man's skull in (so as you don't quite kill him) for twelve months, but if you forges his name you catches it hot. This ain't nothing to the purpose, though. Let's get on with the registers."

The books were sadly the worse for damp and mildew, but so much care and ingenuity had been expended by the new clerk upon their restoration, that the bindings were firm, and the contents perfectly legible. There were three in all, the one in use making the fourth.

"This," said Ferrers, drawing forward one of a smaller size, and more ancient-looking manufacture than the others, "is the first."

"How am I to know that," asked Lagger.

"Because it commences in April, 1697 — the month in which the church was first consecrated."

"And how am I to know *that*?"

"I will show you the deed by which it was endowed."

"What! you've bin and took the deeds away too! I say, young fellow, you've bin going it!"

"I took away everything that hole contained. A crack in the external wall had widened, and the rain came in, and the recess was half full of water when I opened the door. If I had waited till I could get leave from the wardens, the entire contents might have been destroyed."

"And what odds was it to you if they had been?"

"None to me, certainly; but it might have been of the most vital importance to some one else."

"Humph—m!" mused the detective, turning over the pages of the old book, "this seems to be all square enough, and not so badly mended either."

"When does the next begin?"

"The first entry is the 22d September, 1748, Elizabeth Carter and Herbert Wentworth."

"Good! go on a page or two. Stop! there's something scratched out."

"Yes, but if you look to the bottom of the page, you will find a note explaining why this was done. The woman gave her mother's maiden name, as they sometimes do still, in these parts, when the father is dead. The clergyman found out her mistake, and corrected it. The note is in the same handwriting as the entry, and signed with his initials."

"This book seems as if it had been well-nigh all to pieces," resumed Lagger, turning over page after page; "but how do you know that the leaves you have stuck in belong to the places where you have bin and stuck 'em?"

"I compared the dates of the several entries, and sometimes an entry ran from one page into the next, and so guided me."

"They ought to have bin 'drawed up in a regular form, and numbered."

"You will find that that is done, when you come to the time when the Act of Parliament was passed, which —"

"Now don't you go jabbering to me about Acts of Parliament," interrupted Lagger, — "just as if I didn't know the law!"

"Here, then, you find it complied with," said Ferrers, opening the third volume. "I suppose it was not thought worth while to have a new book, as this was not quite filled up; so the few entries under the new system have been made in a form ruled by hand. The book now in use is printed, but the entries run on regularly from the first — year after year."

The detective continued to make his feigned scrutiny with much apparent care, dwelling upon an entry here and there, in order that when he came to that which alone he cared to see, no suspicion might be aroused as to his motive in closely scanning its details. Habit had made him careful, and long experience as a hunter of criminal men, had taught him what remote and trifling mistakes will sometimes suffice to put the quarry on his guard, and lengthen, if not break off, the chase.

"Just so," he said, as he came to the more formal entries; "Number — When married — Name and Surname — Age —

Condition — Rank or Profession — Residence at time of marriage — Father or mother's surname — Rank or Profession of father. Right ! When you marry," observed the detective, shaking his forefinger at the new clerk, " it ain't sufficient for you to know who was your wife's father and mother, and what they was ; or for your wife to know who was your father and mother, and what *they* was. The law steps in and sez, 'Des-cribe yourselves, every one of you. I want to know all about the lot, that's what the law sez ! ' I ain't a-going,' sez the law, ' to have you making a row when you get tired of each other, or any one else making a row for you when you're dead, and saying, " This 'ere John Smith was John Smith, but he wasn't the identical John Smith as married Mary Brown ! " I ain't a-going to stand none of *those* little games,' sez the law, and so I tell you ; consequently the law will make you des-cribe yourself and your fam'ly, and your lovely bride's fam'ly too, so that there may be no mistake about it, — that's what the law does."

" I am perfectly aware of the regulation and its intention," said the new clerk humbly.

" Wery well, then ; don't you get a-trying to e-wade 'em, or else you'll catch it hot, and so I tell you." This warning was delivered by Mr. Lagger with much severity of tone and gesture, as though the new clerk were on the point of leaving the room to contract a marriage in defiance of the legal forms.

Ferrers could not help smiling — troubled and anxious as he was. " *When* I marry," he replied, " you may depend upon it that I shall observe all due formalities."

" You'd better," said the unrelenting Lagger ; " but where are we now ? Oh, March, 1834, when you enter the certificates properly ; hem ! not many of 'em ; January '35 — more people married about Christmas time, I see, than any other season of the year. April, four entries — one a week. April's got a page to itself. Well done, April, 1835" (the detective was getting gay), " and the merry month of May's only got one. I wonder now," he continued, quoting from the entry, " what has become of Georgina Bosser, who was 19 years of age, and a spinster, the daughter of Mark Bosser, of this parish, farmer — and who married William Cox, widower of full age, whose governor's name was likewise Bill, and farriers the pair on 'em ? I wonder how that there young gal got along with her second-

hand article ? Did he get a-naggin' at her about the virtues of the dear departed, or are they a comfortable old couple ? Lord ! if any book-writing gentleman could put down here what all these couples *said* they'd do, and what they intended to do, and after all what they really *done* — what a rum story-book a marriage register would be ! But let's get on — let's get on. June, 1835, has one, two — ah, and here the book ends. Hand over the last volume, young man," said Lagger, leaning back in his chair and whistling a tune, " and let's get along with June, 1835."

The new clerk removed the books through which the scrutineer had passed, and spread the last open at the first page before him. Mr. Lagger was in no hurry to look at it. He examined his boots, he examined his finger-nails, he examined nothing at all, very fixedly, out of the window ; at last his attention returned to his task. " And so," he remarked, in the most casual of tones, " this 'ere new book — leastwise this 'ere book which is the one in use now — begins in June, 1835 ; good ! How many entries was there in the last one for this month of June, 1835 ? "

" Two : one on the 2d, and the other on the 9th," replied Ferrers, referring to the older volume.

" And here we have — . What were the names in the other two ? " asked Lagger quickly.

" Job Stokes and Hannah Barnardiston, on the 2d, and Jane Crofter and Charles Shelmordine, of Manchester, on the 9th."

" And the numbers — the numbers ? " demanded the detective, his face getting flushed, and his manner full of excitement, in spite of him.

" Stokes' marriage is No. 54."

" Shelmordine's, then, is 55 ? "

" Of course ! It is the last entry in the book. The next will be that where your hand is now."

" That," replied the detective sternly, but in a very different tone from his assumed severity of a few moments before, " that is dated July 28th."

" Well, — what then ? "

" Where are the entries of marriages which took place in the mean time ? "

" There were none, I suppose," replied the new clerk. " You find only one for May. Why should you suppose that there should be more than two in June ? "

" There were four marriages celebrated in June and July which are not entered in this book, or of which the certificates have been destroyed," replied the detective decisively.

"How can you possibly know that?" said Ferrers, smiling incredulously, but turning a little pale. "Excuse me saying so, but guesswork —"

"Goes for nothing of itself," said Lagger, looking at him hard and full in the face; "but it leads to a good deal, as you shall find, my fine fellow. I guessed there was some'at wrong about you, and like-wise about these books; pretty much as a beagle guesses there's a hare cutting along somewhere, when he comes upon her scent. Guesses is scent to me; and here" (bringing his fist down upon the first page of the newest book, with a thump which made the old table creak again), "here's my game run into and chopped up."

"I cannot see anything to complain of there," replied Ferrers; "there is not an erasure or a blot, and every particular filled in as regularly as can be. What fault do you find?"

"The last entry in the other book is numbered 55; the first in this is numbered 60. There are four certificates in every page, *consequently a whole page is wanting!*"

"Good God!" exclaimed Ferrers, "it is so, indeed! But you do not think that I — You cannot accuse me of — of —"

"For the present," replied the detective, in his quietest manner, "I say a whole page is *wanting*. I don't accuse nobody of nothing, but I must have this 'ere page. Where is it?"

"I cannot tell you. I have never seen it. Never till this moment noticed that there was a gap in the dates."

"And yet you noticed the dates in the other parts?"

"Because there were a lot of loose pages which I had to fit in at their proper places."

"Where did you put them? You may have forgotten this one."

"No; I am perfectly certain that I fixed them all."

"All that you brought from the church, perhaps; but it may be in that hole this very moment."

"Impossible! I searched it thoroughly. Besides, it was only about the middle of the third book, where it was open, — having fallen from the shelf, — that the leaves were loose. If you look at the end, you will see that they are all intact. Look at the back, under the binding, and you will see for yourself that what I say is true."

"Then how do you ac-count for the gap in the numbers?"

"Probably the clergyman, or his clerk, made a mistake. These entries in the commencement of the new book are in the

latter's handwriting. He was an old man even then. He might have forgotten the number of the last entry, or made a guess at it, to save the trouble of referring back. Oh, really," added the new clerk, with an attempt at a laugh, "there are a dozen ways of accounting for such a trivial error."

"It ain't trivial," replied the detective sternly; "and it's not to be accounted for anyhow. I *know* there is another page somewhere or other, and it's for you to find it."

"For me? I have nothing whatever to do with it."

"Now, you jest attend to me," said Lagger; "I ain't a-going to be too hard upon you, and I ain't a-going to shirk my duty. If you'd a let these 'ere books alone, and stuck to your A-men, as you ought to have done, you *would* have had nothing to do with it; but you goes a-meddling with things as don't concern you; as usual, you burns your fingers. Suppose I goes to the parson, or the two church-wardens, and sez, 'There's an entry as I knows was made, and which I can't find in your books,' — what will they say? They'd say, 'The clerk's a been and meddled with these volumes. He's routed 'em out of their proper place. He's took 'em, and a lot of them loose leaves home; and we can't be held responsible for any fraud he's com-mitted.'"

"Fraud! What possible interest could I have in suppressing anything?"

"I ain't here to answer your questions," replied the detective; "I'm here to examine these books, and to re-port upon their con-dition. Now, what I says, I means; and what I means, I sticks to; and what I sticks to is this 'ere: — You find these 'ere missing entries. Not a word. I won't hear it. Be they made on a leaf torn out of either book, or be they contained in another odd book, or a piece of odd paper, — you find 'em, or you dis-cover who's got 'em."

"But how am I to do this?"

"That's your business," replied the detective, rising, and taking up his hat.

"You have no authority to require me to make such a hopeless search," said Ferrers moodily; "and I refuse to attempt it."

"Wery well, wery well; then I must make it myself."

"That will be far the better way."

"Ex-actly. So come along with me to Mr. Thomas, and listen whilst I tell him *why* I'm a-going to ask a lot of seemingly impertinent questions in his parish. You young ninny-hammer! Don't you see that

you can make in-quires without suspicion agin you, having already took to meddlin' with the books? It's one way or the other, you know;—either you have stole these entries, and destroyed 'em, or you haven't."

"I swear to you most solemnly that I have not."

"Well, then, if you haven't, you take the high hand, and you go to Mr. Thomas and the wardens, and you say, 'Here's four entries wanting; and it's your dooty to investigate the case; or else it's *my* dooty to write to the bishop, and ask him what he thinks of it'."

"But you say I had no right to look into the books."

"And you said as Mr. Thomas ap-proved of your doing so."

"According to you, he is also without authority to give such approbation."

"Humph—m! Never you mind. You're on the popular side, and if you're wrong in re-moving the books, the wardens are wrong in keeping 'em where they did, so *they* can't say nothing. Any way, you do what I tell you. It'll be better for you to be turned out for ex-ceeding your dooty, than for being a con-victed felon."

"And if I fail in my search for the missing leaf?" asked the miserable Fer-ners.

"Well, then I shall be o-blighed to form my own con-clusions as to how it come to be missing, that's all," was Lagger's reply. "No, I sha'nt take no tea," he said, in an-swer to a gesture from the new clerk; "I never breaks bread with those as I has my eyes on pro-fessionally. You fill up a cup, and chuck the stuff out o' winder, dirty a plate, and make belief as though I'd had some grub. And look here,—I shall stop at Macclesfield for a week. It ain't far for a young fellow like you to walk, so you come over next Thursday, and let me know what you've done. You'll find me at the Stork inn. D'y'e mind? Rout out them entries, or discover the man who's took 'em; or, as sure as eggs is eggs, you'll never say A-men again after next Sunday."

And with this, the detective took his leave.

"You've been precious hard upon that young fellow, Sam Lagger, — precious hard," he mused, as he passed along; "but what are you to do? You *must* find that page; and if you can get hold upon a likely cove to help you, why, — pro-fessionally, — you'd be an ass not to squeeze him pretty tight. As to the mo-rality of the thing, — you jest wait, my man, till you're retired into private life, before you goes bothering yourself about morals."

CHAPTER XXVI.

NANCY.

STEPHEN FRANKLAND, in the mean time, had arrived in London, and settled affairs with Messrs. Puddle and Snap, whom he found most accommodating gentlemen, with almost a repugnance to ready money, when presented in the form of a payment in full of all demands. They would take the captain's I O U; they would take the captain's guarantee; they would take the captain's bills at six, twelve, eighteen months,— anything rather than his crisp new bank notes for the entire sum due on Sir George's acceptance. They would renew, they would extend, they would accept part payment, and leave the rest to run on, with interest, till it was quite convenient to the Baronet,— anything rather than be paid and have done with it. If people in difficulties will borrow money,— and there must be such a class as bill discounters,— what a blessing it is that these latter will sometimes put their business into the hands of such delightfully courteous gentlemen as Messrs. Puddle and Snap, attorneys-at-law! How fortunate for impecunious humanity that this respectable firm exercised such a great influence over their clients! Why, they could make them do anything. "My dear Sir," Puddle would say to some bewildered youngster who had received some peremptory demand, "never mind what that fellow, Smith, says. He's a vulgar fellow is Smith, and does not know how to deal with gentlemen. Let me have a couple of ten pound notes for him by the day after to-morrow, and take my word for it that he will renew." Considerate Mr. Puddle! "Proceed to execution!" would exclaim Mr. Snap, under similar circumstances, "not if I know it. If Brown wants to go on like this, he must find another solicitor; I sha'nt distress a gentleman who means well. Give him a new bill for principal and interest, and let him wait." Honest Mr. Snap! These things, however, were done only for those who were sure to pay in the long run; and since the result of such indulgences was that the original debt would be paid half a dozen times over, as in Sir George Tremlett's case, *some one* was no loser by them. In short, Messrs. Puddle and Snap farmed the turnpike on the road to ruin, and kept it in remarkably good travelling order.

Our Stevie, like most young Indian officers, had gone a short stage upon that famous and much-frequented thoroughfare.

He was a little behind hand with his agent; there were a few figures against his name on the wrong side of the book in a Calcutta bank. He had slightly anticipated the rents of his small patrimony, and he had been obliged to dip somewhat further, to provide for the expenses of his visit to England, and return. You know of his resolve not to touch a shilling of Brandon's money. How then did he procure those crisp new bank notes, the acceptance of which caused Mr. Puddle so much grief? Why, he went to Cuddy Lindsay, and said,—

“Cuddy, I owe just a thousand pounds. Hitherto I have not quite managed to live upon my pay, and it will be three or four years before my rents run off the mortgage on the farm at Durmesone. I want a hundred directly. Will you lend it me?”

And Cuddy made no reply whatever, but only asked him “how he'd have it?” when he had drawn a check for the amount, and put on his hat to get the cash from Twining's.

But what a goose he was, observes the reader, not to take the money from his mother, when she offered it to him, instead of telling a fib, and placing himself under an obligation to a mere friend! Well, he is a goose; I don't pretend to deny that; only don't talk about “mere friends” in that way; because there's many a man who would rather be under a heavy obligation to a “mere friend” like hearty little Cuddy, than owe a shilling to such blood relations as Stephen Frankland had. Only fancy how delighted “dearest Francis” would have been when, in his systematic management of his mother's accounts, he discovered that Stephen was indebted to her for his father's release! No; he got the money he required from Cuddy, paid the greater part of it to Mr. Puddle, and then went off quietly and insured his life, so that his friend should not possibly lose by his prompt and kindly assistance. Nor was there the least shyness between them afterwards. Stevie took it quite for granted that he was welcome to the money till he could return it; and Cuddy thought it the most natural thing in the world that his old schoolfellow should have asked him for it, and should keep it as long as he liked.

Then, in a few words, Stevie gave him to understand that there were reasons which had made his home not so pleasant as he had hoped to find it; that the business upon which he had spoken on a former occasion, was anything but completed; and that he intended to remain in Lon-

don till it was, and then rejoin his regiment.

“I am sorry for you — very sorry, poor old boy!” said Cuddy; “but, to tell you the truth, not one bit surprised. I have heard fellows talk of your brother, and can easily imagine your turning your back on Tremlett Towers. I know a little of that affair at Westborough, and can understand what you wish to see done before you leave England; but, in the mean time, I'm not going to have you sulking and wasting your substance in hotels, or giving yourself up a prey to lodging-house keepers. You're coming to live here. Gigas,” said the little man, addressing Jackson, who just then entered the room, “Captain Frankland — to be known henceforward in these regions of the blessed as Stevie — is coming to live with us; so be careful, Sir, and behave yourself properly.”

“I'm sure I shall be delighted to have him in the chambers; and we'll get up a revolution, and raise barricades against you, you small despot, in no time!”

“But I shall be inconveniencing you. You've no room,” said Stephen, to whom, however, the idea was an agreeable one.

“We have the apartment which once used to be inhabited by the person formerly beloved here, and known as Lorimer, but of whom we have been obliged to get rid.”

“Say rather, who has been obliged to get rid of us,” laughed Jackson.

“Gigas has expressed himself in his usual brutal manner, but there is some truth in what the creature says. Several attorneys whom, in the interests of justice, I hope soon to see struck off the rolls, on account of their confirmed and rapidly increasing lunacy, have given Lorimer so much business, that he has taken a first-floor in Paper Buildings, and become a rising man. The very day after you left, he got two special jury briefs, and became unendurable; so he has gone, as the dew-drop is blown from the bough; and you are to have his room, and conform to the regulations of the establishment.”

And so it was arranged, greatly to the satisfaction of all parties.

“Not that we shall be able to amuse you,” said Cuddy. “People who come to London in September must take the inevitable consequences. There's not a soul in town, — only about two million and a half. The odd thousand or two have gone abroad.”

“Are you not going anywhere?” asked Stephen.

"Presently. Gigas has an idea that he is going to Italy."

"I am,—next week."

"Gigas, I repeat, has an idea that he is going to Italy, but he is not. Gigas is going where I am going; and that is not to Italy."

"Did you ever hear such a little tyrant?" said Gigas. "I declare one cannot call one's soul one's own, for him!"

"The lower animals, and bipeds over six feet two in height, have no souls; therefore your complaint is trivial and impertinent," replied Cuddy, with much gravity.

"Cuddy, my child," said Jackson, "you are getting fractious. You require to be nursed; you know you do. You have only been dandled in these fond arms once since the captain was here last. Come here!" and the jolly giant approached his small friend with outstretched arms, who uttered a burlesque shriek of despair, and fled for refuge behind Stevie's chair.

"Save me!" he cried, dodging from side to side, "save me from this monster! The man who would see his Cuddy in distress— Ah, Stevie!—if you don't come to my rescue, I'll chop up all the hair-brushes in the chambers, and fill your bed with the bristles every night."

"If you do, you shall sleep in it."

"Thus shamefully betrayed and abandoned, I surrender at discretion; which means that Gigas is to be supposed to have the usual number of organs, moral and physical, and that he is to let me alone. In token of which we will smoke the calumet of peace. What, ho! Dagon! In the name of the prophet,— pipes!"

So tranquillity was restored, and Cuddy took an early opportunity of telling Stevie what a splendid fellow Gigas was; and Gigas, as soon as the little man's back was turned, launched out in his praises, narrating how he had nursed him (Jackson) through the scarlet fever, having found him, quite by accident, living alone in other chambers, deserted by every one, and too weak to seek, or even call for assistance; till Stevie became almost gay again in their pleasant, hearty companionship.

Immediately upon his becoming settled in the Temple, he wrote to Mr. Lagger, according to agreement, giving his address, and requesting the detective to call upon him there. He directed this letter to Little Union Street, and posted it with his own hand; but having received no reply, he wrote again at the expiration of

a day or two, and this time the missive was intrusted to Dagon, otherwise Charley Wantley, for deliverance into the charge of Her Majesty's Postmaster-General. The features of this youth expanded into a broad grin, when he saw the address; and with open mouth, and hands extended behind his back, he winked, after the manner of small boys who burn to disclose the depth of their knowledge or observation, to Stevie, and cried,—

"Oh, Sir! if you please, Sir, it's no use sending this. The gentleman ain't come back yet."

"How on earth do you know that?" said the surprised captain.

"Please, Sir, he lodges with us, Mr. Lagger does. Mrs. Wantley's mother, and we live in Little Union Street, with Nancy."

"And, pray, who may Nancy be?"

"Nancy Riley, Sir," replied Dagon; and then sinking his voice, and assuming a mysterious mien, he added, "and if you'll believe it, Captain Frankland, she's a-getting better."

"Very glad to hear it, I'm sure. What has been the matter with Nancy?"

"Why, please, Sir, she was mad."

Stephen started. "Nancy Riley—mad! By heaven, it must be the same! Has she a brother with her?"

"No, Sir, not with her; but he comes to see her sometimes,—not often. At first, mother thought he had played her a trick, and cut away, and left Nancy to be took care on for nothing; but he came back all right. He tea'd with us last Sunday."

"Where does he live?"

"Don't know, Sir."

"Do you think your mother does?"

"Don't know, Sir; but I'll ask her," added Dagon, with a jerk, delighted at the prospect of having something to do.

"You will do no such thing," replied Stevie. "Where is Little Union Street?"

"Down in the Boro', please, Sir. You go over Blackfriars Bridge, and take the fourth turning to the left, and the first to the right, and then cross—"

"Never mind telling me now. You shall show me the way yourself, when you go this afternoon."

"Lor, Sir! are you coming to see Nancy?"

"Never mind whom I'm coming to see. What time do you leave here?"

"Six o'clock, Sir."

"Then at six I shall be ready to go with you."

In due time, Dagon, bursting with importance, rushed into his mother's little back parlor, and, to her great surprise, announced that a gentleman, one of his masters—the new one, a great captain from India—wanted to see her. The good lady had been cleaning up, and was hardly presentable, at that moment, to company. Bang went the door, and Stevie was left waiting in the shop, whilst its mistress performed a hasty toilet. At first he thought he was alone, and began to fidget and worry at the idea that he was intruding on strangers: for Stevie had the idea that it is quite as bad taste to intrude upon your inferiors, as upon your equals or superiors,—an idea which the better judgment of many of his contemporaries has scouted as it deserves. He was roused, however, by a voice which proceeded from behind him, and asked what he pleased to want. He turned, and saw a rather good-looking girl, poorly, but very neatly dressed, who had evidently just risen from a seat behind the counter, and who, with her knitting in her hand, came forward and put the question which had turned the current of his thoughts. He came prepared to see Nancy Riley, but could not recognize the poor witless slattern whom he had encountered in that green Westborough lane, in the pale and almost refined-looking young woman that stood before him.

"I have come to speak with Mrs. Wantley," Stevie replied; "is she at home?"

"Yes." And she sank back into her chair, and resumed her knitting, without another word or look.

"Am I right in supposing that your name is Riley?"

"I'm Nancy Riley. I live—I live with Mrs. Wantley, Little Union Street."

"Do you not remember me?"

"No."

"I saw you once at Westborough."

"I must not talk about Westborough."

"Why not?"

"Because I live here now. I live with Mrs. Wantley, Little Union Street."

She spoke as a child would speak, looking him full in the face, and deliberating over her words.

In a few minutes Mrs. Wantley appeared, looking very hot and red about the elbows, and wafting along with her a powerful odor of yellow soap. I do not know which was the more shy or embarrassed of the two; but after a profusion of apologies on both sides, Stephen came

to the point, and made his inquiries after the erratic Jim.

Mrs. Wantley was very sorry,—very sorry indeed,—but, upon her word and honor, she did not know. Jim was here to-day, and gone to-morrow. He never would tell her where he lived; though, to be sure, he acted quite honorable, and paid his money like a man. Did she know when she would see him again? No, she did not. Perhaps he would come that very night,—perhaps not for a month. It was quite uncertain. He was working hard at his trade, and—Well, he was doing something else as well. Did the captain know him?

"I met him once," replied Stevie; "and I think if you will mention my name, and ask him if he will give me a call at Mr. Lindsay's chambers, that he will come. I should like to see him much, for two reasons,—one personal to myself, and the other relative to that poor girl," he said, sinking his voice, and indicating Nancy.

"Oh, ho!" replied Mrs. Wantley, assuming that mysterious air peculiar to matrons of her class; "about Nancy, is it? Then I'm sure he'll call. Do you know, Sir, he's working night and day for that girl?"

"I rejoice to hear it, and so will some friends of mine, who took a great interest in her, having known her mother."

"Her mother!" cried Mrs. Wantley, "this is news! So you know who her mother was, do you, Sir?"

"Certainly, though I never saw her. She died the day before I came into that part of the country in which she lived; but I heard much about her from my friends."

"You'll excuse me, Sir, if I'm making too bold," said the good woman, still in a state of high excitement, "but I've taken such an interest in poor Nancy, that I cannot help asking. Might one know who her mother was?"

"Of course. She was a highly respectable, though humble person, and lived at Westborough, in Kent."

"O dear, dear, dear!" replied Mrs. Wantley, in a tone of disappointment. "Is it only that you know? I hoped you had come to tell us whose child she *really* was."

"Why, what can you mean? Is she not Riley's sister?"

"Not she. She's— But I've no business to talk about what don't concern me. I ask your pardon, Captain Frankland, I thought you knew more than you do,

and therefore I've said more than I ought."

"Mrs. Wantley," said Stevie earnestly, "I assure you that I am not actuated by any mere curiosity. I assure you, most solemnly, that I have no motive but a good one in following up the clue you have let fall. May you, — will you tell me what makes you suppose that she is not Mrs. Riley's child?"

There was no resisting the appeal of those honest, earnest eyes; and, indeed, Mrs. Wantley did not require much pressing to enlarge upon a subject which she had long burned to have a gossip about. But the shop was not a fit place for it; so having explained, by way of a salve to her conscience, that as the captain was friendly to all parties, and she was friendly to all parties too, there could not be much harm in such friendly persons exchanging friendly information, especially as he (the captain) was a great gentleman, and might be able to help them all, — she showed the way up to Mr. Lagger's room, where (after having dislodged its usual invader, the haughty Flora) she then unbosomed herself of what had been weighing like lead upon her mind for many a long day.

"Well, Sir," she began, "I don't mind confessing that things were not going smooth with us when poor Nancy came; and she hadn't set foot in the house a week, when they began to mend; and they've gone on mending ever since. My eldest boy, Sir, has come home, and is behaving like an angel, — though, poor fellow! he is a cripple for life; and Flora, — that's my daughter, — she's engaged to be married to a very respectable young man, a chemist and druggist, next door. Add to this, that Mr. Lindsay has raised Charley's wages; that Helen, my second girl, has been put on in speaking parts, — she was in the ballet, Sir; and that the shop is taking at least five shillings a week more than it did last year, and you will see that we've much to be thankful for, Sir. I can't help thinking that it's Nancy who has brought us good luck; and therefore I'm all one with those who try to bring good luck to her."

"Your feelings do you credit; but you were going to tell me what makes you think that she is not Riley's sister."

"Mr. Riley told me so himself, Captain Frankland, in as many words. He's a rough, rude sort of man, is Jim, but I don't think he 'as a bad heart. You see he was badly brought up, and soon settled down

to a vagabond life. He couldn't bear to live at home, and, from what I have heard of poor Mrs. Riley's way of life, it was not one to suit a wild young fellow like him. I don't know that it had not a good deal to do with poor Nancy's weakness of mind. Why, she brightened up wonderfully directly she came here. But I'm wandering from my text, ain't I, Sir?"

"Well, you are slightly, — pray go on though."

"Thank you, Sir. Well, the second time I ever saw him was about a fortnight ago. We thought we should never see him again, but that's neither here nor there; and I put it to him roundly, What are you going to do with Nancy? She's got quite bright and handy about the house, I said; and though I don't pretend to say that she's got *all* her wits about her, she's got enough to take charge of a little place for you, to keep it clean, cook your dinner, ay, and buy it, too; for she's uncommon sharp about money. She's welcome to stay here as long as you like, I says; but supposing anything was to happen to me, I says, where would you be? She's your sister, says I, and you ought to provide for her. 'To tell you plain truth, Mrs. Wantley,' says he, 'she's not my sister.' Not your sister, Jim? says I. 'No,' says he. Then whose child is she? says I. 'I wish to God I knew,' says he, thumping the table with his fist; 'but I'll find out. Mark my words, missis,' — he always calls me missis, — 'I'll find out, sooner or later.' And with that, he up and told me all about it."

Stephen drew his chair closer to the speaker.

"He told me that his mother, — she was his mother, you know, — was very fond of Nancy, and used to moan about what was to become of her when she was gone; for she was a long time ailing before she died. And she used to beg and pray Jim to steady down, and be able to take charge of her, giving him to understand that there was a money payment, — she would not say how much, — which came in regularly every quarter day, on her account. Upon this, Jim he asked her straightforward if the poor creature was not some gentleman's child, that was to be kept out of the way? and she did not deny it. Many a time he begged and prayed her to tell him all she knew, so that Nancy might not want for friends when she died; but she wouldn't speak. No, she used to say, 'Not now, — not now. Wait. They may own her; they may send for her. I cannot trust you, Jim.' For you see, Sir, what

with poaching, and rows at fairs, and what not, poor Jim had got a bad name, and even his own mother dursn't tell him a secret which would put other folks in his power. ' Still,' she used to say, ' I'll tell you some day, — I'll tell you some day before I die.'

" Well, the ' some day ' came, in which, perhaps, she would have told him, but he wasn't there to be told ; and so she died, and the secret with her ; but in searching over her things, he found what convinced him that Nancy was a lady's child."

" What did he find ? "

" Ah ! that I can't get him to tell ; but he says he has a clue, and is working on it hard. He's not a man to be beaten by trifles, isn't Jim Riley ; and, depend upon it, he'll hit the mark some day or other."

" On the contrary," said Stephen, " he appears to me to be a very foolish fellow, and to be taking the worst possible course to gain his end. Why, the persons of whom I have spoken would have done ten times more than he can ever do to get Nancy her rights ; but he stole her away from Westborough in a most reprehensible manner, and frustrated all their kind intentions."

" Jim Riley's not so black as he's painted, Captain Frankland ; but he's not an angel, for all that. He looks after number one, like most of his betters ; and he's not going to give up the credit or the *profit* of finding out whose child Nancy is, to any one ; and I don't blame him for it."

" I see," said Stephen coldly. " It will be much the same to him whether she be acknowledged or remain as she is, so that he gets his price."

" No," replied Mrs. Wantley firmly, " I don't think so badly of Jim as that. Jim's been cried down enough. He's tired of a vagabond life, and his aim is to make an honest name. He'll make it, Captain Frankland, as sure as you sit there ; and I wouldn't, for a thousand pounds, be in the shoes of those who have an interest in keeping Nancy's birth a secret ; for it will come out. Mark my words, Captain, it will come out, and before long, or I don't know Jim Riley."

" Do you know where he is now ? "

" No more than the child unborn, Sir. As I said, he may be here to-night, and he may not turn up for a month."

" And I believe that Mr. Lagger's movements are equally unknown to you ? "

" Oh, as for him, he's always uncertain. If you want to know where he is, you'd

better go to Scotland Yard. *They* know where to find him."

" A capital hint ! " said Stephen, " and I will follow it."

" But now turn and turn about's fair play," said Mrs. Wantley, whom the lengthened gossip had put entirely at her ease ; " I've told you what you want to know, as far as I can ; now tell me what you want with Jim Riley."

" Certainly. There was a murder committed at Westborough the day he left it with Nancy. At first, suspicion fell on him, but there is reason to think that it was unfounded. Another person, a stranger, was there also, on whom grave suspicion still rests. It is possible that Riley may have encountered him, and therefore I wish to ask him a few questions, — that is all."

Stevie had sample enough of his entertainer's garrulity to make him keep silence respecting the new suspicions which her story had raised in his mind. What if this poor half-witted girl were the child towards whom the *act of justice* was to be done, — the abandoned and disdained offspring of George Howell ? What if Mrs. Riley were connected in some way with the writer of the letters found in Brandon's room, — with the Susan or Sarah Alston who had helped him to hide the other papers in Mangerton Chase ? The idea was a mere guess. That there were thousands of other unclaimed children in the country, he knew ; but the presence of this one, in the very place chosen by Brandon for the meeting with the person undoubtedly interested in concealing the identity of such a child, was at least strange and suggestive, and, for want of any other clue, a circumstance well worthy of deep consideration.

Stephen soon took his leave, having received Mrs. Wantley's promise that as soon as she saw or heard of Jim Riley, or Lagger, she would let him know by Charley, otherwise Dagon, at his chambers. As he passed through the shop, he heard the quick thumping of a crutch behind him, and a gaunt, sickly-looking lad shambled forward and opened the door. Stephen thanked him, and passed into the street without looking into his face.

Messieurs et Mesdames, — enemies to those in whom I hope the reader feels some interest, — *garde à vous !* The hunters are out, and woe betide you if any one of them fall upon your track ! Jim Riley is working on in his own way. Ferrers, the new clerk at Craigleigh, must find that marriage certificate, and shortly, too, or

he is a lost man ; and Lagger, the long-headed, the cool, the ambidextrous, is not idle, we may be certain, *somewhere*. A poor cripple, reclaimed from a jail, opens the door to Stephen Frankland, the most earnest, but perhaps less skilful of the huntsmen, and the chase has well begun. Will the race be to the swift ? — the prize to the strong ? Who can tell ?

The following morning Stephen betook himself to Scotland Yard, and made inquiries for Mr. Sampson Lagger. Of all people in the world who know the least about the police, command me to policemen. Lagger's name was a household word in that locality, but where to lay a finger on its owner, no one knew ; but every one could direct Stevie to some one else who did, and who, when applied to, was just as much enlightened as the individual who had suggested him as omniscient. Every official agreed that Lagger was "on duty," but where, and what about, no tongue could tell. Eventually, Stevie, being in downright earnest, pushed his inquiries up to the fountain-head, and poured them on the able and courteous head of the metropolitan police. From him he got an answer. He was happy to make the acquaintance of so distinguished an officer as Captain Frankland. He was sorry to find him inquiring for a person in Lagger's department. He trusted that the case was not a serious one ; but his rules did not permit him to divulge where a detective was employed on secret service. Lagger was so employed ; and much as he (the chief) desired to oblige Captain Frankland, he must decline to give him the information he asked.

"One thing, perhaps, you will find yourself at liberty to tell me," said Stevie. "In some dealings — no matter what — which I have already had with this man, he referred me to you for his character, as an honest and trustworthy man. What is your opinion of him ?"

"A little headstrong, and fond of his own way. Slow, but sure. The most incorruptible and straightforward man in the force. Were he otherwise, he would not be employed as he is. Good-morning !"

And so Stephen was left in the dark.

In the mean while, what had the little great world down in Derbyshire to say about him ? It had a good deal to say. It saw him, by a credible witness, walk over to the station that morning, which we remember, with his carpet-bag in his hand. It heard, by a credible witness again, that he had sent a fly from Derby for his lug-

gage. It concluded, and not without reason, that something had gone wrong at Tremlett Towers ; and it drew its own conclusions according to its light. He had fallen out with his father ; he had fallen out with his mother ; he had fallen out with his brother Francis ; he had run away from the snares of Laura Coleman ; he had run away from the snares of Grace Lee ; he had eloped with the under housemaid ; he had been jilted by each one of those ladies ; he had been arrested for debt ; he was obliged to go abroad, on account of that affair down in Kent, which never had been cleared up ; he was going to be knighted, and receive a lucrative appointment in Ceylon ; he was going to be tried by court-martial, for being absent without leave. Lastly, he was not quite right in his mind, poor fellow ! and don't you remember the fit of *delirium tremens* which he had that night when he frightened Miss Lee so, in the old Hall ? The balance of testimony was certainly against him, and even kind-hearted Mr. Coleman shook his head when he remembered the conversation which they had had at the garden-gate, and the cavalier manner in which Stevie had thrown off his warnings about Grace Lee.

Meanwhile, the object of all these conjectures lived in the dark, in blissful ignorance of all that the great little world said or thought about him. No day passed in which he did not expect to hear of Lagger or Jim Riley, and in this state of uncertainty, he had written to Lord Rossthorne, postponing his promised visit, but promising that the next month should not pass without seeing him. London became very dull and still. Cuddy remained in the Temple, and Gigas did not go to Italy, but was allowed two days' barbel-fishing at Teddington Lock, as an equivalent. So time passed on, and Stevie — who had devised a hundred plans of working out his clue, but found himself unable to take the first step in any of them — began to fidget at double Frankland power, when, one morning, Charley Wantley glided mysteriously into his bedroom (he had a bad habit of smoking in bed of a morning,) and gave him a note from his (Charley's) mother, in which that lady informed him that she had heard of Riley, and that, to the best of her belief, he was, at that moment, in or near Westborough, making inquiries about Nancy.

Frankland dressed quickly, and joined Cuddy and Jackson at breakfast. They were in close converse.

"May we venture to inquire," asked

the former, "to what we are indebted for this unusual honor?"

"I'll tell you. I'm going to leave you this afternoon for a day or two."

Jackson looked at Cuddy with a queer expression on his great face, and Cuddy smiled a smile of pity, not unmixed with surprise.

"And pray where do you think you are going in this unceremonious and highly reprehensible manner?" asked Cuddy, "without asking permission too!"

"I am going to Westborough."

The two friends burst out into a roar of laughter.

"Stevie, you've been playing the eavesdropper, and are making a virtue of necessity," said Cuddy severely; "this is a lamentable example to show our young friend here."

"Playing the eavesdropper," replied Stevie, coloring, "what do you mean?"

"It has been arranged ever so long — for the last ten minutes, in fact — that you are going to Westborough this afternoon," said Cuddy; "it has been arranged ever so long that Gigas and I should go, though Gigas did not know it, and pretended he was going to loaf his unwieldy carcase about the Colosseum. A letter received this morning from my uncle, with a postscript from Gertrude Treherne, which profane eyes are not permitted to read, has settled the *when*, and ordered that you are to be brought. Therefore, Gigas, you will please to see that a supply of clean shirts and other necessaries proper for the captain's appearance amongst ladies, be packed in his portmanteau, and you will both be ready to escort me to the station at half-past three o'clock; — so, thank goodness, *that's off my mind*."

"But," stammered Stevie, "I could not think of —"

"It is not necessary that you should think at all, Sir," responded Cuddy; "the exercise of intellectual powers in these chambers has long been confided solely to me. Brute force, when necessary, is performed by Gigas. As for you, being a distinguished officer and accustomed to command, your duty is to do as you are told and to hold your tongue. Eat your breakfast. Do you imagine that we should leave you in these chambers alone with the silver spoons? Preposterous!"

"What a fellow you are, Stevie!" he added shortly afterwards, in a more serious tone; "how on earth did you know that we were going?"

"I had determined to revisit the place for purposes of my own, quite ir-

respective of your movements," replied Stevie.

"I am glad of that — very glad of that; for do you know I was afraid that the reminiscences you have of it would be too painful to make you care about coming."

"I tell you frankly, I would not go there, if I had not a purpose in view, other than visiting Mr. Treherne, much as I like him and his daughters; but as it is, I do not see why I should not accompany you."

"Which means that it is a horrid bore our going, but that you will try and make the best of a bad job," said Cuddy. "Never you fear, old fellow; no one shall interfere with you. You shall do exactly what you like; go where you please, and no one shall ask questions."

"I wish to God, Cuddy, I could tell you all, and ask your guidance and help in this wretched — you know not *how* wretched — case. It looks so unfriendly. But I cannot, I dare not;" and Stevie bowed his head and moaned.

"Poor dear old man," said Cuddy, laying his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, "don't you see that you make me respect and love you more than ever, by the noble way in which you are keeping this confidence? No! I'm horribly curious, I own, but I would not have you let me into the secret for worlds. As for my guidance and help — set me to do anything you like, and I'll do it without asking why or wherefore; yes, and I'll be hanged if Gigas sha'n't, too; and if he opens his ugly mouth to ask questions, I'll very soon stop it."

So the trio went down to Poundbridge, where they found Mr. Treherne's carriage waiting for them. Cuddy insisted upon driving, and away they went towards Kernden merrily, but it was not without a shudder that Stevie passed the lane that led to the wood and the old sawpit behind Westborough church. The road was full of associations for him. Here it was that Nancy Riley sat — here where he had parted with Jim — here where he had met his father. Pondering over these recollections, he fell into a sort of dream; and the little carriage had drawn up at the rectory, before he knew where he was. Suddenly roused from this reverie, he was the first to descend. He strode into the porch, and began to rub the dust off his boots on what he took to be a small rug placed there for the purpose; but the rug gave a howl, rushed into a corner, and barked at him furiously.

The rug was Doggie!

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEALS WITH PUZZLES, OR AT LEAST
ONE SORT OF THEM — WOMEN.

YES! What Stephen took for a doormat was Doggie, and tremendous was the resentment of that unprepossessing animal. If it were possible for a dog to bark himself into convulsions, Doggie would have done it. As it was, he barked till he could bark no longer, and then his indignation subsided into an angry and reproachful whine, from which he would burst now and again into a fresh paroxysm of barking, as though it had suddenly occurred to his mind that he had not sufficiently asserted his wrongs.

Now, when Doggie was free from durance vile — as, in his character of guest at Kernden Rectory he was, just now — he and his mistress were generally to be found together — the only redeeming point in Doggie's disposition being his affection for Grace. But how came Grace to Kernden? Simply thus. Very shortly after Stephen's departure from Tremlett Towers, a great change came over this young lady's demeanor and conduct. I wish I could say that it was marked with those results which my reading teaches me should be observed in the deportment of damsels with well-regulated minds, when laboring under similar trials. Would the reader like her better if I were to say that she "brooded o'er her silent grief as in its nest the dove;" that "she let concealment, like a worm in the bud, prey on her damask cheek;" that she "pined in solitude," and so on? If he would, please let him skip on to the next paragraph. Let him fancy that she behaved in all respects as he would wish the girl of his heart to behave, and not seek to know the truth, which, as a faithful historian, I am bound to tell. And this is, that she became silent and — must it be said? — sulky; that she was cross with her favorite Jane, and boxed Bobby's ears; that she grew discontented with herself, and extremely disagreeable to the whole Coleman family. Let me say just a few words in her defence, and I will go on. She loved Stephen Frankland with all the strength of her pure, strong heart. Her woman's tact taught her that her affection was returned; but she knew also of the cruel rock which lay between her and the haven of her happiness, and she had seen — or thought she saw — her life's hope shipwrecked upon it. Not a word of all Mr. Coleman had said about the pride of the Franklands, and the misery

of their unequal marriages, had been lost upon her. With gentle eyes — love-softened — she watched Stevie from her window as he passed through the garden on the day of his last visit to Ruxton Court. She saw him pause with her guardian at the iron gate, and, in her mind, *heard* all that passed. Oh, how her heart leaped with joy when she saw our Stevie snap his fingers in the air, and turn away gayly towards his home! How it sank when the news came that he had left it — gone not to return! He had taken counsel with night, and prudence had come with the morning. But she had no reproaches for him. All her anger was directed against herself. "Idiot that I am," she would break out in the midst of her long fits of musing, "to think that I could ever become the wife of an honorable man! I, the poor disowned — perhaps the child of shame! But, oh, father! oh, mother! if you had only let me know you; if you had only *tried* to love me; if you had only trusted me, instead of leaving me all alone and unloved, all alone in the world — God help me! — all alone!" And then tears would come to her relief, and she would sob herself to sleep.

"My love," said Mr. Coleman to his wife one day, "our Grace is fretting herself to death after that fellow Ste — after Frankland. She ought to have some change to divert her mind."

"So she ought," agreed his better half; "I'll get Beatrice to invite her to Ellwood."

"Stuff! your sister Beatrice is a — Well, she has not your pleasant qualities, my dear. Ellwood is not a lively place, and Grace would mope there more than she does now."

"Let her go to her own relations, then!" said Mrs. Coleman, in a decisive tone, with a little vexation in it.

"My love!"

"Don't speak to me in that reproachful way, Coleman, as though I had said something wicked, when I am talking common sense. The girl *has* relations, I suppose?"

"My dear — *business*!"

"If you go on in this way, Sir, I declare I shall begin to think that —"

"No you won't, Laura!" was the lawyer's reply, as he stole his arm round the ample waist of his buxom wife; "no you won't, old woman. We haven't lived together forty years for that. Have we now?"

"Well, I don't mean to say that you know more about her than you ought," replied Mrs. Coleman, mollified by the not unfrequent act of affection from the hus-

band she really loved and respected ; " but you will own that it is hard to have a girl under one's own roof, interfering with the prospects of one's own flesh and blood, without knowing who she is, or where she came from. Not one wife in a thousand would put up with what I have, Coleman ; and you know it."

" Because you are a wife out of a thousand, my love," replied the old lawyer, with a quaint smile. " But, to be frank with you, I do not talk about Grace and her affairs, because, in the first place, it's *business* ; and in the second, because I know no more about them at this moment than you do."

" But you can guess."

" I never guess. When old Spencer Fane asked me to become the girl's trustee — it's all nonsense calling me her guardian, for she is of age — he said that there were reasons why her parentage should not be discovered ; and that he had taken care it never should be. Now I know enough of old Spencer to be sure that the clue to a secret hidden by him is not to be *guessed* out of its hiding-place."

" Could he have been her father ? " mused Mrs. Coleman — not to be done out of her conjectures.

Her spouse shook his head gravely. " But we are wandering away from our subject," he said ; " Grace must have some change. It's quite clear that she loves Stephen, and that he has jilted her. Don't you see how she clings to everything associated with him ? Why, she has even taken up with Lady Tremlett."

" That's true," replied Mrs. Coleman. " Do you know that Rhoda has been here twice this week, evidently to see her ? and Grace has promised to spend to-morrow at the Towera."

" Well, it will do her no good to go there. Now listen to me. Isn't she engaged to spend Christmas with the Treherernes ? "

" She is, and it's a great bore. She is so very useful at Christmas time."

" It will not do to put it in that way ; but if you were to hint that it would be a pity for her to miss our little gayeties — particularly as the Treherernes, being in mourning, cannot have any parties — it might, perhaps, be arranged that she should go there at once. She's fonder of those girls than she is of ours — naturally enough, for she's known them longer, and they would cheer her up if anybody can."

" But suppose Stevie were to go there ? "

" What ! and revive all his associations

with Brandon's murder ? Nonsense, my love, it's out of the question."

Only see what a prophet Mr. Coleman was !

His ideas were communicated — diplomatically enough — to Grace, and jumped at. And " how splendid of you to come, you delicious thing ! " wrote Gerty Treherne, in reply to the letter in which her friend asked if it would be quite convenient for her to change the time fixed for her promised visit.

The only person whom this arrangement displeased was Lady Tremlett, who — as we know from the hint thrown out by Mr. Coleman — had suddenly taken a violent fancy for Grace.

" What ! " she cried, when she heard the news, " you going too — you going to leave me ? Oh, Grace ! how can you be so unkind to ? What shall I do ? what shall I do ? "

" Do ? " replied our candid Grace, " why, pretty much the same as you did a week ago, I suppose."

" But you cannot think — you don't know how I have learned to cling to you in that little time. I *must* have somebody who is good to cling to now, Gracey dear. Oh, if Stevie had only stayed — if you would not go ! "

" I can understand your wishing to have Captain Frankland here," said Grace, in a low tone.

" Do you think he would come back ? " asked my Lady, eagerly ; " we will all beg his pardon if he will. Oh, ask him to come back, Gracey — do ask him ! "

" Nonsense, Lady Tremlett ! How can you suppose that I could do such a thing ? "

" But if we were all to beg his pardon," reiterated Lady Tremlett, in a tone of entreaty — " if Francis were to promise to behave better ! But I forgot — you don't know why Stevie went away."

" I suppose he had his reasons," said Grace, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

" Oh yes, that he had ! and we all behaved so badly — he so well. Do you think he will ever come back ? "

" How can I possibly say ? " replied Grace, who was burning to know what reason Lady Tremlett assigned for her step-son's abrupt departure. " How can I possibly say," replied the astute damsel, " unless I know why he went ? "

And then the poor weak woman told her all — all about the arrest of Sir George, and the conduct of Francis and Stephen thereon, with many digressions touching the behavior of the former towards his

half-brother ; and Grace went home a happier girl than she had been for many a long day, but still not happy. Good reason was there for Stevie to leave his home so suddenly ; but had he not left her too, having heard that she was what she was, and without a word — a line to say Good-bye ?

Knowing my Lady's silly, volatile nature, Grace thought little of the sorrow — almost despair — which she evinced at their parting. The time came when she saw what it meant.

So she went to Kernden, and there learnt, for the first time, that Stephen Frankland had taken up his quarters with Cuthbert Lindsay, in the Temple, but knew nothing of the latter's approaching visit; for the best of reasons — because he was not expected till the day before he actually arrived, and poor Doggie was mistaken for a mat. Cuddy, you must know, had a long-standing invitation from his uncle to run down when he pleased, with his friends, for such pheasant-shooting as the neighborhood afforded ; but having heard that there was a probability of the girls spending some time at the sea-side with their aunt, the little man postponed his trip ; not wishing (for reasons of his own) to expend his bidding upon a time when they — at least, one of them — should be away from home. As soon, then, as he heard that their departure was indefinitely postponed, he wrote to say that he was coming "immediately, if not sooner," and asked for leave to bring a friend, whom he described, in the slang of the day, as "a young man from the country," in lieu of Lorimer, who had gone abroad. "And won't they be pleased, just" — he chuckled to himself — "when they find it's old Stevie ?"

If this reticence had not been preserved, the county of Kent would not have contained Miss Lee when the carriage drove up with the three Templars to the rectory door. As it happened, however, she was standing in the little honeysuckle-shaded porch, with Doggie at her feet, her hands clasped before her, and her beautiful head thrown back wearily — gazing up into the clear autumn sky, and thinking — thinking — thinking.

Doggie did not hear the sound of approaching wheels, for, upon the principle of "love me, love my dog," he had been plied with all sorts of unaccustomed viands at luncheon, and was sleeping the sleep of innocence and dyspepsia. Grace's thoughts were busy afar off, and the phaeton approached within a dozen yards of her

before she was roused from her reverie. Then one glance was enough, and she fled — fled through the hall, up the stairs, and into Gertrude's room, where she found her friend preparing to dress for dinner, and rushed upon her, and seized her by the arm.

"Oh, you wicked girl ! oh, you false, wicked, wicked creature !" she gasped, with flashing eyes, and lips all in a quiver "you knew it, you knew it, and did not tell me ! Oh, Gerty !"

Gerty was really frightened — and well she might be — by the suddenness of the attack.

"Good heavens ! what has happened ? Are you mad, Grace ? What on earth do you mean ? I declare you have hurt me dreadfully !" she continued, as she shook off the grasp of her excited assailant, and looked at her pretty white arm in the glass. "You wild animal ! I shall not be fit to be seen to-morrow." And, indeed, there were five red marks, which bade fairly to become black ere long.

"You knew he was coming !" cried Grace, with a stamp of her foot and undiminished anger. It's a plot between you, and its shameful — shameful !" And here, exhausted by the excitement, she broke down, and began to cry.

"Dear Gracey," said Gertrude, mollified by the sight of her tears, "do explain yourself. I give you my word that I am not conscious of having done anything to make you speak and look thus. Gracey ! little mother ! can you think that your child — your own Gerty — would hurt you ?"

"Little mother" was the school name of the Treherne girls for their friend and protector ; and now Gertrude took Grace in her arms, as she had been taken many a time by her in her own childish troubles, and petted and soothed her, begging the while for an explanation of what had so distressed her.

"He's here !" she sobbed, "he's here now, — just arrived with your cousin Lindsay, and they'll say that I came to meet him. I am sure they will. They've said all sorts of horrid things about us already, and you know I never expected him. You know I did not, Gerty ! How dare you sit there and smile, you wicked girl, like that ? You know I did not !"

"Did not what, dear ?"

"Why, know that he would come ! How could I ?"

"Perhaps you will enlighten me as to who this mysterious 'he' is, and then, maybe, I can answer you."

"Were you, or were you not, aware that Captain Frankland was expected with Mr. Lindsay? Tell me candidly, Gertrude."

"Candidly, no! — but has he really come?" she asked. "What a goose Cuddy is to play such tricks! He only told papa that he was going to bring a friend. But what a pleasant surprise!"

"Pleasant for *you*, I dare say," replied Grace, dryly; as for me, I shall leave this house as soon as it is convenient for you to send me to the station."

"Humph," mused Gertrude; "I think I see. Grace, dearie, there used to be no secrets between us. You don't love me less than you used in the old days, do you?"

"No, my darling, not one bit!"

"But you love some one else a good deal more, slyboots! You love this handsome, grave Stevie!"

"Pshaw!" was Grace's contemptuous reply. "Love him!"

"Not a little, — little bit?"

"Don't be silly, Gertrude."

"I am so glad you don't like him, dear," said Gerty, hiding her winsome face on Grace's bosom, and creeping close to her, "because, you see, you're so pretty and clever, that other girls would have no chance against you. He's just the man to fancy a clever girl like you, and, — and you're my own dearest friend; but you don't love him the least bit, Gracey, dear? I don't mind telling you that I — I —"

A change, curious to behold, came over Grace Lee as these faltering words fell on her ear. The contemptuous smile left her lip, and it quivered with a totally different emotion.

"You!" she gasped, turning deadly pale, and repulsing the lithe and elegant figure that reposed in her arms, as though it had been a snake that had stung her, "you! oh, Gerty!" And there was a depth of reproach and misery thrown into those two little words that I cannot attempt to render. But Gerty only burst out into a peal of merry, musical laughter, and shook her finger at Grace, saying, —

"Oh, you hypocrite! If you do not love him, why shouldn't I?"

"The man's a fool!" replied Grace, vexed at having fallen into the trap.

"What for, dearie?"

"Because he's so mild and humble, — that's why. He goes about just as though he were nobody at all, and lets them all trample upon him down at home, just as

their bad, cowardly hearts please, when — when —"

"When what? — eh?"

"Why, when the top of his little finger is worth them all, body and soul together. Because he's the noblest-hearted man, the kindest, most honorable gentleman that ever won a poor girl's heart. There! it's out."

It was Grace's turn now to hide her face.

"Woe betide poor me," said Gerty, with a smile, "if I had called him a fool. He would be one if he did not love you, though. He does love you, Gracey?"

"A little — a very little, I think. That's the worst of it."

"His loving you only a little?" asked Gerty, archly.

"No, dear," said Grace, a shadow of pain passing over her flushed face as she spoke; "his loving me at all."

"You very strange child, why?"

"It will grieve him when — I mean, if he should ever — Gerty, I can never be his wife."

"Oh, Gracey! Why not?"

"No matter, love. You and yours have been very good to me — most considerate and kind; and in forgetting what — what I am, and giving me your friendship, think that others are equally generous; or, perhaps, do not think about it at all. Others are not equally generous, Gerty."

"But, dearie, if we, who are only friends — though very stalwart and dear ones, you know — love and honor you, as we do, without considering that — without thinking of anything but your sweet, winsome self — surely the man who loves you would do the same."

"At first he might," replied Grace, sadly; "but, in the course of time, ill-natured people might pity him; he might repent of having made a nameless girl his wife; he might even tell me so."

"Not if he is the man you take him to be."

"I do not think he would say so in words. I don't depend on their words to know what is going on in people's minds. He has never told me that he loves me, and yet I am sure he does — a little. Were we to marry, he would never tell me that he had grown weary of me — that he was ashamed of his poor foundling of a wife — but I should know it; and, oh, Gerty, it would break my heart!"

Gerty could only reply with a caress.

"But it is no use talking thus," continued Grace, dashing aside her tears. "He

knows what — what I am *not*, and perhaps he is wise, and has determined to forget me." And then she told of their last meeting, and Stevie's abrupt departure from his home, with what she had heard from Lady Tremlett of its cause. She also narrated, to the intense indignation of honest Gerty, the versions told by the scandal-mongers of the neighborhood, both of this and the affair in the old hall. "And so, dearie," she said in conclusion, "you see that it would never do for me to remain here now that he has come."

"It would never do for you to go, you goose," replied Gerty, "for then they would say that he had really attempted something wrong. No; if any one has to leave, it must be him."

"Yes, and of course people would declare I had made a dead set at him, and he had run away to escape! A likely story, indeed!"

"Well, then, as there are objections both ways, let's ask Maud what she thinks best. You don't mind trusting little Maud, do you, dearie?"

So Maud was called into the council, and told all. It was a pretty sight to see poor Grace seated between those affectionate girls; the arm of one round her neck, and the arm of the other round her waist, and with a hand of each clasped in both of hers. Not the fiery Grace of half an hour ago, or the quiet, resolute little woman whom we have been accustomed to see at Ruxton Court, but a sad and trembling Grace, full of fears and doubts; one who required much love and sympathy at that moment, and who got it.

"Well, dearest," said Maud, "you know I don't pretend to be as wise as Gerty, but it seems to me that you ought both to remain — for the present, at any rate; and I think that Gracey ought not to be selfish."

"Selfish, Maud!"

"Don't be cross, dear. You've told me to say exactly what I think; didn't you now?"

"Yes! yes! Go on!"

"If Captain Frankland really loves you, and tells you so, and you really love him, you ought to take his feelings into consideration. What right have you to make him miserable for a *certainty*, because you fancy there is a *chance* of his making you unhappy some day years hence?"

"He will soon forget me," replied Grace, abstractedly.

"I do not think so badly of him," said Maud. "He has evidently got something preying on his mind. He's unhappy, dear.

I never saw a man so altered. I should have hardly known him again."

"Have you seen him, then?" asked Grace, quickly.

"Yes, just now, in the garden with Cuddy; and, oh! such a great big friend of his, that Mr. Jackson he talks about."

"And how is he? how does he look, dearie?"

"Oh, very good-humored, but rather awkward, I must say."

"What Ste—— Captain Frankland, I mean, awkward?" exclaimed Grace.

"No! no! not Captain Frankland. I was speaking of Mr. Jackson."

"You goose!" said Gertrude. "Do you suppose that Grace wants to hear about your Johnsons and Thompsons?"

"His name is Jackson."

"What's in a name? Your tall, awkward friend, Maud, by any other name, would be quite as uninteresting to Gracey; wouldn't he, dear? What about the man of men?"

"Well, he's looking very haggard and stern, poor fellow. I'm sure he has something on his mind."

"Or is in love," interrupted Gerty.

"Maud is right," said Grace. "He has something on his mind — something dreadful. He told me so."

"Oh gracious! What is it?" demanded the two girls in a breath.

"That he did not say. I only know the fact. He did not give me any particulars."

"And you did not ask him?"

"Ask him, Gerty!"

"Excuse me. I spoke without reflecting. What on earth can it be?"

"I think I can guess," said Maud, after a short pause.

"You clever little thing, what is it?" asked her elder sister.

"May I say, Grace dear?"

"Of course you may."

"Well, then, I think it's something to do with the murder of his friend, poor Mr. Brandron." But Grace, remembering what had passed in the old hall, shook her head; and then Maud quoted, in support of her view, Stephen's refusal to deliver up Brandron's papers at the inquest, and all that the landlady of the Rising Sun had told her father about there being a secret between the dead man and Stevie.

"But what strikes me as most odd," said Maud, "is something that we heard only the other day. It seems that on the day of the funeral, Captain Frankland went over to 'The Wells,' and made all

sorts of inquiries about where Mangerton Grange was. Now, did you not say in one of your letters, when you first went to live with the Colemans, that that was the old name for Tremlett Towers?"

Grace started, flushed, and trembled, at the thought which this statement created.

"Yes," she said at last, "I did say so."

"Then you may depend upon it," said Maud, in the triumphant tone of one whose prophecy is giving signs of fulfilment, "that there is some connection between this poor Mr. Brandron and the Frankland family, though, perhaps, your Stevie does not know it."

Grace thought of the scene in the old hall, and the strange words which Stevie had spoken in the conservatory at Ruxton Court, and was bewildered.

"It is this that is making him miserable," continued Maud, "and, oh, Grace, if we—I mean if you could help him to clear up his doubts, and drive this black cloud away!"

"Shall I go up to him, drop a curtsey, and say, 'Please, Sir, give me your confidence'?" said Grace, with a grim attempt at levity.

"No, dearie," replied Maud; "but you're so clever, you might win it, if you liked, without appearing to wish for it. It must be so sad to have a grief, and not a friend to share it with."

"How do you know he has not got a friend to share it with?" asked Gerty. "Don't be sentimental, puss."

"Perhaps he has told Cuddy."

"Cuddy's a goose! No one would dream of confiding anything to him."

"You're always running poor Cuddy down, Gerty," said her sister, "and it's very unkind. Isn't it, Grace?"

"I don't know," she replied, wearily, "perhaps it is; but you must remember that I have never seen your cousin, and therefore cannot judge whether or not he is an injured innocent."

"Well, you will see him very soon," said Gertrude, rising, "for there goes the half-hour bell, and we've none of us begun to dress yet."

"I don't think, dear, that I *can* come down. Please make some excuse for me," pleaded poor Grace.

"Oh, dearie, that would never do. You must come down to-day, and we will hold a council of war to-night, when we go to bed, and see what is to be done for the future."

So the friends separated; and half an hour afterwards, Grace sauntered into the drawing-room with an air of the utmost

unconcern and indifference, attired in a plain black silk dress, and shook hands with Stephen as though meeting him thus were the most natural thing in the world.

Dear ladies, was I wrong in taking the general public into the sanctum of those young girls, and playing the eaves-dropper as I have done? Do you suppose, gentlemen, that you have all the talk to yourselves, in your club windows and smoking-rooms? You have been treated to a conversation which, on the whole, is flattering to your sex, but don't suppose that the dear creatures to whom you devote your hours of idleness invariably sing the same song. When you roll away in your handsome from opera or ball — when you stroll off to the club after the promenade — when you sit up at night over your soda-water and brandy, in the pleasant country-house wherein you are favored guests, and talk over Mary This, and Clara That, and what you suppose to be passing in the mind of pretty little Rosina, together with the mighty effect which your lordship's gracious presence and condescension is producing upon the sex in general, — in such hours, I say, do not your lofty ears burn sometimes, and are you not conscious that you are being talked over roundly in your turn? Can you flatter yourselves that silent laughter lives only in sleeves of broadcloth, and that nothing but captive sighs are heard in the small hours around toilet-tables, upon which bracelets glitter? Ha! ha! my tall friends, laugh and be gay. "When ignorance" — you know the rest. We are lords of the creation, are we not? we in white chokers! Sultans every man of us, with the world for a harem! Who shall dare to laugh at our Crimean beards? As for me, it is tolerably well known that I keep a familiar, who assumes in public the form of a large bluebottle fly, and whom I am bound to provide with fifteen thousand python's eggs a day for his dinner, under pain of being torn to pieces, but who unroofs houses for me like another Asmodeus; and I as faithfully assure you that I have never heard anything that would make you wince in the sacred places just indicated. So let us be gay — mighty ones that we are — quaff the flowing bowl, and think of the trophies that we shall win to-morrow.

The result of the council of war was a determination that no notice should be taken of Stephen's arrival; and, to judge by Grace Lee's manner towards him on all occasions, no one would have guessed that his visit gave her the least uneasiness.

As a general rule, it is not pleasant to be bayed at by an ugly cur, but the howls of Doggie were exquisite music in the ears of Stephen Frankland. He had foreseen what interpretations the Coleman family, and, indeed, Grace herself, might place upon his sudden exit from Derbyshire, and it fretted his sensitive mind sorely to think that he should be so misjudged by those he respected — by her he loved. Half a dozen times he essayed to write to Mr. Coleman, to his wife, to his old playmate, Laura, and account for his apparently heartless conduct, but was stopped by the utter impossibility of explaining it, and a sense of the futility of saying anything that was not based upon an explanation. "Now," he thought, "I can find an opportunity to show her that some better cause than this idiotic pride people talk about, or idle superstition, prevents me from trying to win her affection." (The goose could not see that he had won it already.) "Would to Heaven that I could tell her all!" What occasion was there to tell her anything — what need of an explanation, if she did not care for him? None whatever, of course. Stevie was in love; and when people get into that lamentable state, logic and common sense are the last things which occur to their distempered minds.

Accordingly, he, too, set about playing a part, became gay and indifferent; and to anybody who was behind the scenes, there was more real acting going on daily in that quiet Kentish parsonage than is to be seen behind the foot-lights of several popular metropolitan theatres that could be mentioned. The two principal performers determined that they would do nothing that could betray their actual characters, and, in consequence, made themselves as wretched as their worst enemies could wish them to be; not only themselves, but certain of their very good friends; for no doubt the astute reader has perceived that there was something more than a mere cousinly liking between Cuddy and the lively Gertrude; and, consequently, may imagine that it did not add to the comfort of the former, or of poor Grace, to see the handsome captain always walking by Gerty's side in their rambles, and constantly in possession of her ear at other times. However, Grace took good care to disguise her feelings during this game of cross purposes, and you may imagine how pleasantly the time passed. If people will go play-acting in private life, they must take the consequences, and three days of this work sufficed to cool considerably the

friendship between Gerty and Grace, Cuddy and Stephen, and sowed the seeds of a very pretty quarrel between the two latter. However —.

—♦—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOWEVER —.

HOWEVER! The idea of heading a chapter *however*!

Dear reader, if I only had the wit to write all that *could* be written under such a text, I would print the work in five-and-twenty volumes, bound in morocco, with gilt edges, and my portrait — after a photograph by Smeare — opposite the title-page. I'd make my publisher's fortune; think of that, long-suffering man! For myself, I'd smash every ink-bottle in the house, and have currant and raspberry tart, with Devonshire cream, for dinner every day of my life. However —. There it is again!

What is "However"? It is the great high bank, with double posts and rails on the top, and ever such a ditch on each side, which "pounds" us in full cry after our favorite fox, be his name Pleasure, Ambition, Gain, what you will. It is the bane which fills the healthy draught with death, the antidote which renders the poisoned goblet harmless. It is the bridge leading to and fro, connecting this world with that place which is said to have such a peculiar pavement. Look at it! See the swarms of wayfarers going *down*, elbowing, laughing, struggling on, and saying within themselves, "It's very dangerous, it's very wrong; **HOWEVER**, we think we'll go." How they press forward! how impatient they are of delay! Amidst so dense a crowd, you can hardly recognize the few who are trying to stem the tide in the contrary direction, and who say, "It's very pleasant, it's very easy; **HOWEVER**, we'd better turn back." Hustle them, knock them down, trample them under foot! What right have they to get in honest people's way, and tread on their corns? Turn back, indeed! We all intend to turn back some day; don't we? Of course we do, and this good intention is never destined to macadamize the region just indicated; never, never! The resolutions made for the future by such fellows as Jack and Tom and Harry, are not worth a snap of the fingers; but yours

and mine, my dear Sir, are very different; so come along.

This is one of those digressions which, I am told, are knocking off fifty-seven pounds eleven and sixpence a page from the commercial value of this story. I don't care! A pretty story it would be if I were to stick to any facts. Shall I say, "Once upon a time there was a secret, and two people who were in love; and the secret bothered them, and somebody found it out, and then it was all right again; you know" — would that sort of thing suit? If so, there it is; and I'll write half a dozen like it every week, and sell them for three hundred guineas apiece.

I concluded the last chapter with that "will-o'-the-wisp" of a word, which has led me thus astray, for a special purpose. What a poor foolish bird is that which sticks his thick head in the sand, and fancies no one can see his plumes! What vastly superior beings were the ladies and gentlemen at Kernden Rectory! They were all so sure that they were each working towards his or her end undiscovered, and that this end was a good one. Grace Lee was quite sure that she could play her cards so as never to give Stephen the glimmering of an idea respecting the secret which fluttered in her poor little breast. Stephen was quite sure that he could let her see that there was some hidden obstacle between him and her heart, without touching it in the attempt. The Treherne girls were quite sure that they would smooth the path of true love for their friends sooner or later, and that Cuddy never could be jealous. Cuddy was quite sure that he was beginning to hate old Stevie. Good, simple Mr. Treherne was quite sure that nothing extraordinary was going on in his house; and all were perfectly agreed that Gigas was far too stupid to have anything out of the common way on his big hands. How — I had very nearly done it again!

Whilst all these heads were in the sand, Stephen had not neglected the business which had been the cause of his visit to Westborough. He took an early opportunity of telling his host of the discoveries he had made respecting Jim Riley, and the poor afflicted girl who had passed as his sister. The good rector was no less delighted than surprised at the news, and readily acceded to Stevie's request that he would give him his aid towards discovering Nancy's parentage. "And I'm sure it's very noble in you, Captain Frankland," he said, "to take so much trouble about one who has no sort of claim on you."

"No sort of claim upon me!" mused Stephen. "If it should turn out as I suspect!" But he kept his own counsel, and the credit given to his disinterestedness.

Between them they discovered that Mrs. Riley had come into the neighborhood with the child some fifteen years ago. That, from certain hints she had let drop, it was generally understood that she had come from Norfolk; that she had been in service, and had saved money; that she had married, and lately lost her husband; that a lease of the cottage in which she died had been bought for her by some attorney in London, whose name the steward of the manor could not remember; and that at first the child wore very good clothes — silks and laces — and had a gold chain round its neck.

Stephen also found out that Mr. Lagger had been staying at the Rising Sun, and that since the departure of the detective, Jim Riley had been beforehand with him (Stephen) in the inquiries that he was making amongst the old people of the village. No more information could he obtain far or near.

Oh! if he could only discover the lawyer who had negotiated the lease!

One day, whilst thinking of something — perhaps it would be more true to say some one — else, an idea ran full tilt into his head, as ideas sometimes will run, when you are not laboring after them. The same person who had tried to keep Brandon out of the way had, it might be concluded, a hand in sending Mrs. Riley and the child from where they were known. That Mr. Williams, who had corresponded with the murdered man just before his departure for India, "Might it not be," mused Stephen, "who had established Mrs. Riley in that quiet Kentish lane? What a blockhead I am not to have thought of this before!" He determined to leave the next day, return to London, see the attorney, and try what else he could get out of him.

It was on the road back to the Rectory from Westborough, where he had been prosecuting his inquiries, that this idea struck him, and, on entering the garden, he found Gertrude and her sister seated on a rustic bench, which surrounded the bole of a huge oak-tree, and working away at their — I don't know what to call it — a wondrous and bewildering tangle of colored worsted, pretty fingers, and sticks; that's what it was! Working away, I repeat, and chatting confidentially. A little startled, a half-guilty smile broke over Gerty's face as Stevie made his presence known,

for the sisters were so intent in their converse that they had not noticed his approach.

They began to talk about many unimportant things, and at last a walk in the plantation was proposed. "Only wait a minute or two," said Maud, "Grace will come directly;" but just then her father appeared at his study window, and called her; so little Maud tripped over the green-sward to do his will, whatever it was, bidding her sister not to start till she came back; and so Stevie and Gertrude were left alone under the great oak. Not the least disconcerted were they, either of them; for Gerty was an agreeable, lively girl, and had always plenty to say for herself; and Stevie's thoughts were too much given to another to feel anything awkward in being *tête-à-tête* with Gerty in that quiet, shady spot.

"I do think," said Gertrude, as she watched the crimsoning sunset, "that when our English autumnal days are bright, they are the pleasantest in the whole year."

"They are indeed," Stevie replied; "but, like other pleasant things, they must come to an end,—at least, for me. I shall have to thank you all to-morrow for having given me some of the pleasantest hours I have spent since I returned from India;" and Stevie sighed.

"And why particularly to-morrow, Captain Frankland?" asked Gerty, with a smile.

"I regret to say that I must leave you then."

"To-morrow, — already!" she said, opening wide her soft eyes, and looking a little scared. "Why,—why,—you have had no shooting at all yet." She paused, then uttered the last words rapidly, as though the subject had not been in her mind when she began to speak.

"I have had something else to do; besides, your cousin —"

"Oh, don't talk of Cuddy and shooting together. He cannot hit a barn-door. Stupid fellow! But he has got leave for you to shoot over the Brixford covers next week, and you really must stay."

"I cannot."

"Oh dear, dear!" said Gerty; "what a pity! and you've lost all your time bothering yourself about that stupid Nancy, when—." Here something seemed to occur to this pretty intriguer, and she continued, in quite a changed tone, "But I'm sure it's very generous and good of you to

take so much trouble about the poor girl."

Stephen smiled, but made no reply.

"Because, you see, she is so very helpless and alone," Gerty continued.

"She has her bro—— I mean Riley, to take care of her."

"Yes, but I don't quite believe in him, you know; and if he were to change, and desert her?"

"Then she would indeed be helpless."

"I don't exactly know what to think about her plight," mused Gerty, her fingers busy with some grass which she had plucked as she spoke. "Sometimes it seems as though her loss of intellect were a blessing."

"How so?"

"Because, poor thing, she does not know what people think of her."

"What do they think of her?" asked Stevie, eagerly.

"I don't know—I—I—I—cannot exactly explain," stammered Gerty. "It isn't so much what people *say* in such a case as what they do, or rather, what they would do. Suppose, now, that Nancy were sensible, and like any other young woman of her class; would any honest working man ask her to become his wife?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't know; perhaps in that sort of life they don't care about—about such things. If she had been brought up as a gentlewoman, now, it would have been different, of course."

"I cannot see why," said Stevie, getting hot, and fidgeting.

"Because, Captain Frankland, you have not mixed with people whom nobody knows anything about, and, consequently, have never had an opportunity of testing what would be your sentiments towards them," replied Gertrude, in as careless a tone as she could assume.

"Miss Treherne," said Stephen, with flashing eyes, "if I thought that I could entertain towards a lady who was alone and unprotected in the world one sentiment which I would not presume to express about a princess,—if I knew one,—I would not let my black heart beat again in the presence of an honest woman."

A sob of delight sprang up into Gerty's throat as Stephen spoke thus, but she kept it down, and only smiled demurely.

"It takes one back into the days of chivalry," she said, "to hear such gallant words."

"They are something more than words, Miss Treherne."

"Oh, I do not doubt that you mean what you say," she answered, "and I flatter myself that there are thousands of gentlemen who think just as you think; they would not be gentlemen else. Civility costs so very little. But if some sacrifice were required, how would it be? For example, suppose that you had a brother — a *real* brother, mind — and he were to fall in love with a girl without friends or family; would your Frankland pride consent to their marriage?"

"Much good has come of our Frankland pride," said Stephen, bitterly.

"That is no answer to my question."

"I answer it thus: — Our happiness is our own, to make or mar. His marriage is usually the most important step that a man can take. In taking it, he has no right to disregard advice, because it affects the welfare of another; but there is a point beyond which no one should interpose, and, for weal or for woe, he should have his way."

"And the lady?"

"I say the same of her. Who have more to gain or peril by a union than those whom it makes one for life? Let them have every opportunity of discovering the best and the worst in each other's disposition, and then any one who attempts to join or separate them against their will, incurs a responsibility which no one has a right to assume. I think strongly upon this subject," said Stevie, after a pause. "Perhaps I am wrong. You have asked me a question, and I have answered it as best I can."

"Thank you; but tell me one thing more," said Gerty, turning aside her face, and plucking at the bark of the great oak. "Am I right in gleaning from what you have said, that you pay little regard to such considerations as birth, and blood, and pedigree?"

"Oh dear, no! On the contrary, no one esteems them more highly. Why, they influence the entire creation — from the lowest plant, the minutest animal, up to man. It is impossible to disregard them. Would you plant a brier in your rosery, Miss Treherne, and expect it to rival your choice standards? Would you think me a clever sportsman if I were to enter your shaggy cart-horse colt for the Derby, or take Doggie out partridge-shooting as a pointer? Do you blame a milk-maid for not having the grace of body and mind which marks your thorough-bred gentlewoman? No! Then, if the power which has created us has provided that birth and breeding, or the want of them,

shall produce certain effects, can we be wrong if we estimate them at their proper value?"

"Poor Charley always said you were proud," said Gertrude, in a musing tone, from which she could not exclude a shade of vexation.

"If admiration of what is generous and strong, noble and pure, be an indication of pride," returned Stephen, "then I confess poor Charley to have been right, and that I am proud."

"Ah, but now you have shifted your ground. We were discussing the value of good birth, long pedigrees, and all that. How many persons are there, who, having a family tree as high as this oak, are, nevertheless, weak in body and mind, selfish, and the very reverse of noble or anything that is good!"

"I am afraid there are too many."

"And, on the other hand, look at that poor Mrs. Wantley, whom you were telling papa about this morning. Take into consideration her means of being so, and can you deny that she is generous and noble?"

"Certainly not."

"But still you consider birth and pedigree as everything," said Gerty, the vexation that she felt deepening in her tone and manner. "I do not understand you, Captain Frankland."

"Because you — quite unwittingly, I believe — misinterpret me. I do attach much value to birth and pedigree, but only as a means for producing a certain end. Nature has decreed that such and such qualities shall be perpetuated in the descendants of those who, at some time or other, have possessed them; and the knowledge of this law leads us to cultivate those qualities, if they are good, and even to simulate them when we feel that they are imperfectly developed within us. I value what is called 'good blood,' then, not for itself, but for what it is *likely* to produce."

"I don't pretend to be able to argue with you," said Gertrude, looking a little puzzled, "but it seems to me that your doctrine would do a cruel injustice to the low-born, because you must naturally look upon them as *likely* to be mean and depraved."

"If merely applied to them in a physical sense, it would," replied Stevie; "but if thoroughly carried out, as it ought to be, it would not. We should remember, Miss Treherne, that our virtues and our vices have ancestors, and are transmitted, with the color of our eyes and the contour

of our features, from one generation to another, and that diseases of the mind descend no less fatally than the ills which are hereditary in certain races."

"Oh, but that is not universally true. Did you hear what Cuddy was saying the other day about the sons of great lawyers and generals, whose fathers' abilities have won them peerages?"

"I did. And I grant that just as skilful medical treatment can turn a weak constitution into a strong one, so careful mental culture can convert small natures into great ones, only the physical qualities are more easily transmitted than the mental ones."

"In the instances which my cousin mentioned, they are not transmitted at all," she replied, not to be moved from the point she had in her mind.

"Let us be patient," said Stevie, "and wait a generation or two before we assume that. Did you ever keep pigeons, Miss Treherne?"

"Why, where are your eyes? My beautiful fantails! Have you never noticed them on the roof?"

"I am ashamed to say that I have yet to make their acquaintance. But tell me, have you never been annoyed by finding a colored feather in the white plumage of some of the young birds?"

"I believe that you are a conjurer, Captain Frankland," Gerty replied, with an astonished look. "We never had any but pure white birds, and were so proud of them, until last spring, when several of the nestlings came out quite piebald! Why was that?"

"Because they have inherited a black feather from some remote ancestor; exactly as, amongst us, the scion of some family noted for its bravery sometimes shows a white one," replied Stephen, smiling. "Depend upon it that there is much truth in the old proverb, 'What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh,' and that it has a moral as well as a physical significance."

"Then," said Gerty, catching him up quickly, her pretty face lighted up with a bright, eager smile, "when you find a person in possession of all the good qualities—mental and personal—which high birth and an educated ancestry is supposed to bestow, you would conclude that they had been actually inherited?"

"Or that, by extraordinary culture, they had been acquired, which practically comes to the same thing. For what I said before, I repeat—I value high birth and pure descent merely as a *means* for an end, or

rather, a source from which certain qualities may reasonably be expected to flow. Granted that some thorough-bred horses are slugs, and some thorough-bred men, snobs; that is the exception to the general rule. Tell me that I may have my choice out of a lot of hunters that I have never seen, and I will choose the one which has the reputation of the best pedigree. Mount me haphazard, and let me *find* that my nag can carry me through a long day at the head of the hunt, and I will not trouble you to say who his father and mother were. I ought to apologize for talking thus to a young lady," said Stephen, checking himself and turning red, "but you know I am a dragoon, and dragoons are wont to indulge in horsey talk."

"I think your illustration very good," Gerty replied. "It makes me understand exactly what you mean. Pray go on."

"Well, I follow the same rules in society. Give one the choice of what class one should *ma*—I should make friends in, and I should say, give me the thoroughbreds; but if one encounters a person beautiful alike in person and in mind, one would be a dolt to avoid her—him, I mean, because—because I—I mean, what on earth does it matter what her father or mother are like, or who they are? You are not obliged to marry them."

"Oh, Stevie! Stevie! where are your thoughts wandering? Who was talking about marrying, or giving in marriage? Puss! puss! poor pussy! What a fine cat is this which you have let out of the bag! There she is—head down, back arched, tail in the air—rubbing herself complacently against Gerty's skirts, and purring demurely. But Stevie does not see her—does not know—as my good critics do—that there is not one rag of his argument which will hold on to another; and so he goes on, his head well buried in the sand as heretofore.

"There is nothing like an example," he continued, warming into his subject. "Look at your friend Gra—Miss Lee. If she were a duchess in her own right, she could not move with a more graceful dignity—a dignity which inspires respect without repelling. She could not be more beautiful, more thoroughly gentle and good, if the concentrated blood of a hundred belted earls and noble châtelains were in her veins. What can it matter, then, that her origin remains unknown? Is it good? then every requisite which this word demands is fulfilled. Is it bad? then all the more credit to her for having overcome

every evil influence, and being what she is."

"The darling! But oh, Stevie!—may I call you Stevie just for a little time?" continued Gerty, checking herself, and clasping her little white hands together with an imploring air that was not to be resisted—"I should be able to say what I have—what I want—to say to you so much, oh, so much better, if you would not think it odd, and let me call you Stevie. Long before we saw you we all liked you so much by that name, for it was the name by which dear Charley knew and loved you. Maud and I have always talked of you as Stevie," said the frank girl, "as Charley's Stevie, you know, and associated with the name so much that is brave and true and gentle, that just now, when I was going to take a very great liberty, and say something which I could not say to Captain Frankland, the familiar word sprang unbidden to my lips. May I go on? May I speak to dear Charley's friend as I would have spoken to dear Charley himself, if God had spared him to us?"

The grave look which had deepened almost into sternness as Gertrude began, changed and grew sad when she mentioned her dead brother's name, and then slowly melted into that sweet, almost womanly smile of his that we know of. He looked her searchingly in the face, but its kind, anxious expression never wavered. There was no romantic nonsense in Gerty.

"Call me what you please," he said; "say on, and I will listen as poor Charley's friend."

"First of all," Gerty commenced, "tell me; you have no sister?"

"No, thank God!"

Gertrude expected quite a different reply, and was a little taken aback.

"I never had a sister," Stephen continued; "I am quite alone in the world now. I have no home, no brother, no mother! I am the last of my name, and again I say, Thank God!"

"That expression betokens a strange state of mind, Ste—— Captain Frankland, and — pardon me for saying so — rather a morbid one."

"Miss Treherne," replied Stephen, turning his face aside, and speaking in a troubled but deliberate voice, "you will hear and observe many things about me — perhaps you have already heard and observed some — which may make you consider my conduct strange, my mind morbid. I should like to be thought of kindly and well in this house — to leave a good name amongst your family, and — and your friends. It

is a bitter sorrow to me not to be liked and respected by those I like and respect. You will give me credit for this, Miss Treherne?"

"Readily — entirely!"

"Then think what it must cost me to say, 'I am going deliberately to do things which will lose me your esteem, and I cannot offer a single excuse for them — I cannot even bid you suspend your judgment, and let time justify me.'"

"I know what you mean," said Gertrude, quickly; "you have discovered who murdered Mr. Brandron — you are going to give him up to justice, and you fancy we will all think you revengeful and blood-thirsty. Is it not so?"

"You are wrong — quite wrong," Stephen replied. "If the — if that person were to be discovered, and — and punished, it will not be through my instrumentality."

"I am glad of that — very glad! Not but that I should like to know that such a wretch should have his deserts; only one does not like one's friends to be mixed up in such things. Besides, fancy the after-life of a murderer! It must be a far greater punishment for him to let him live in never-ending remorse, in hourly fear of detection, than to strangle him on the gallows. And then, villain though he must be, I dare say there are some innocent ones who care for him, and on whom cruel people would visit his sins."

"Is it not written, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children?" said Stephen, in a changed, husky voice.

"Ay, by God — not by man, Captain Frankland; and not even by God under the covenant of the New Testament, if I read it aright."

"You asked to call me Stevie," he said, with glittering eyes. "Dear, generous girl, you little know what comfort there is in those words."

"You require comforting?"

"God help me! no one more," he moaned, covering his face with his hands.

"Then seek it in His word and promises."

"I have, I have! But, oh! if I had a — if I were not so utterly alone!"

"Stevie," she said, laying her hand timidly, but with sisterly tenderness, upon his bowed head, "dear Stevie, Charley's Stevie! listen to what I was about to say (but with far less reason and force than I can say it now), when by mere accident I touched upon a subject which — I know not why, neither do I ask — has struck such a sad chord in your heart. You are

the prey of some deep and secret sorrow, Stevie; we can all see that, and we have all grieved in beholding it. Do not fancy for an instant that I ask, or wish to become your *confidante*," she added quickly, as he raised his head, and was about to make a reply, "but share your troubles with some one you *must*, Stevie; or they will wear your sensitive nature into the grave. Who knows," she continued, more gayly, "that you are not fretting yourself about nothing at all? An explanation — a reflection, in other eyes, of what appears to you so black and gloomy — in eyes that love you, Stevie — may present a picture vastly different from that over which you brood so painfully. A sorrow shared is a sorrow more than half assuaged. Share your sorrows then, Stevie, but only with her who has the right to bear them with you. If poor Charley were alive you would be guided by him — be guided now by poor Charley's sister, who cannot bear to see his friend so wretched, and who sympathizes with him from the very bottom of her heart."

"What would you have me do?"

"Share your griefs, — whatever they may be, — with the girl you love."

"I do not, — I mean, I must not love any one!"

"Now, Stevie," replied Gertrude, "this is folly. Do you suppose that we are all deaf and dumb and blind down in Kent here? Unless we knew you to be the good man and honorable soldier that you are, we should — *not* being bereft of our senses — think very badly of you; but we are aware that love makes cowards, and — geese of the bravest of you men; and for all your Victoria crosses, and your scars; your bronzed cheek, and the battle-flash which sometimes lights up your eye, we know you to be a very coward in the presence of a certain silken skirt. Do you suppose that little Maud and I have not noticed you start, and turn pale, and tremble, when it has rustled past you? Take heart of grace, Stevie, and — and don't tell fibs. Look up, Sir, this moment, and give a plain answer to a plain question."

Stephen did look up, but disclosed a face so changed, so haggard and ghastly, that the sight of it frightened the playful words that hung on Gerty's lips, and she merely said, —

"You love Grace Lee."

"With all my heart, with all my soul," Stevie exclaimed, with warmth. "I love her now, and I shall love her till my last hour, but I can never tell her so. Good God! what is that?" he cried, starting

from his seat, as a low cry — half sob, half wail — was heard from the other side of the great oak.

He darted round, and there saw Grace Lee herself, — or rather what might have been taken for her wraith, so pale and lifeless did it seem, — standing with one hand pressed upon her heart, and the other stretched out towards the great tree, vaguely seeking for support. She would have fallen if Stephen had not caught her in his arms; but at his touch a shudder ran through her frame, and with a mighty effort she regained sufficient strength to repulse him.

"Maud told me you were here," she gasped, — "that you were waiting for me; and I heard you mention my name, Gerty, and — and — I came; and, oh, Gerty, you know you sent for me!"

But Gerty had disappeared, and therefore there came no response to this appeal.

"Let go my hand, Captain Frankland," poor Grace cried, flushing crimson as she saw that they were left alone. "It is cruel, unmanly of you! How dare you detain me thus, when I wish to leave?"

Grace had a manner of saying "How dare you?" on great occasions, which was not to be withstood. Stephen released her hand, and she sank upon the rustic seat, burst into tears, and sobbed, "Leave me, oh, do, — *do* leave me!"

"I will," said Stephen, sadly; "but not till I have said what, in common justice, in common mercy, you should hear. You have heard too much not to hear still more."

"I heard my name. I thought — Maud said Gertrude wanted me — and — and —"

"Then you heard what followed?"

"Yes, — yes! but you did not intend it for my ears. Do, do consider it unsaid, and now go, — leave me here, and send Gerty back."

"Presently. For the first and, may be, the last time, I must say to you what I have already said of you, — what has been in my heart of you many and many a day; I love you, Grace, as I never loved before, — as I shall never love again; but too fondly, too well, to ask you to give one kind thought for one who may bear a dishonored name."

"A dishonored name!"

"Hear me out, and judge how deep is that love when it forces me to confide to you a secret which I thought I should have carried with me to my grave, unless, — but no matter! And, oh, Grace, if, — no,

I will not, dare not hope. Listen! A few days before I first saw you, when I was last here, a murder was committed in the wood behind Westborough Church. The man to whose gentleness and care I owed my life was the victim. I have too good reason to believe that he fell by the hand of my own father."

Grace Lee sprang to her feet. "Gracious heavens!" she exclaimed, "I see it all!" and then, when he expected to see horror and aversion stamped upon her face, it was suffused by an expression of unutterable love and pity, and in a tone of ineffable tenderness, she murmured softly, "My poor Stevie! oh, my poor, poor Stevie!"

It was enough. The next moment she was clasped to his heart, and —. Come away, reader. No one but the little birds saw what followed, and they won't tell.

"Why, what can be keeping dinner?" inquired Mr. Treherne, looking at his watch. "I declare it is a quarter to seven!"

"Hush, papa!" replied Maud, leading the rector into the bow-window of the drawing-room; "they've only just come in."

"Who have only just come in?"

"Grace and Captain Frankland; they — they've been out for a walk."

"What, in the dark?"

"They did not know it was dark, — they lost their way in the wood."

"Really?" rejoined the good clergyman; "how very disagreeable!"

Little Maud smiled.

"But I'm very glad," continued her father, in a confidential whisper, "that they seem to have overcome that coolness, not to say antipathy, which they seemed to have towards each other."

"Antipathy, papa! What do you mean?"

"You are too young and giddy, my pet," he said, patting his pretty daughter fondly on her fair, cool shoulder, "to notice such things; but it was quite clear from their manner, and the way they have avoided each other, that they had taken a mutual dislike. It is very foolish and uncharitable, Maud, to take dislikes; and I hope when they become better acquainted, — for they are both very estimable young persons, — that they will overcome such nonsense."

"Why, you dear darling of an old blind bat!" cried little Maud, at the end of a peal of musical laughter; "they" — and

she threw her arms round her father's neck, and whispered in his ear.

"Well, I never was so much astonished in my life!" he exclaimed; and his looks did not belie the assertion.

Some twenty minutes or so before this conversation took place, Grace rushed into Gerty's room, flung herself upon that young lady, and cried, "Oh, Gerty, what am I to do? I am so happy!"

"Be as happy as you please, dear," replied she, demurely; "but pray don't tumble my *berthe*. I declare I shall be obliged to change it, and I put it on fresh not five minutes ago!"

"If you are so provoking, Gerty, I will not tell you what has happened."

"Very well, dear; go and dress for dinner. You're very late!" and the provoking one proceeded leisurely to select another lace *berthe*.

"Gerty, dear!"

"Well!"

"He loves me, he loves me, he loves me," cried the happy girl, with a little jump of delight at each repetition of the phrase; "and I've told him —"

"Told him what?"

Strong-minded Grace Lee began to cry; whereupon the provoking one (who, in truth, was burning to hear the news,) was provoking no longer, and heard with great delight how it was that the pair, whom she had left under the old oak, had lost their way in the wood, and what sort of conversation had made them forget all about dinner-time, and that it was getting dark.

"And he's going to write to Mr. Coleman to-night," said Grace; "and we're going to India very soon, and you and little Maud are to be bridesmaids, and your papa is to marry us, — very quietly, you know; and I believe that it was all through you, you darling; and I told such a big fib, — and, oh, I am so happy!"

She was certainly not coherent, though.

"But what fib did you tell, dear?" asked Gerty.

"Why, I told him that I only came up when I heard you say my name; and really, I came just as you said *his*. I heard you call him Stevie, Gerty; and, oh, I was in such a rage! I was so wickedly jealous of you, it was all I could do to prevent myself from springing upon you, and tearing your eyes out!"

"Mercy on us! what an escape I've had! And did you hear all we said afterwards?"

"No, dear, not all; but Stevie told me."

"That was very silly of him," said Gertrude, looking vexed.

"No, dear, it was not. At the risk of my taking offence at knowing how his proposal had come about, he told me all that had passed between you and him; and if there is one quality that I prize more than another in that man," she continued, proudly, "it is his unswerving honesty and truth."

"You are a pair for that, I think," said Gerty, kissing her.

"No, no, we're not," Grace replied, demurely; "I did not tell him half how I love him. I was very reserved and cold to him, poor fellow."

"Well, we must not stop talking here. They're waiting dinner; so run along to your room, change your dress, dearie, and I'll come and help you. It will not take five minutes to slip on that black silk."

"Yes, but I should like—if you thought there would be time—I should so like to wear my white muslin with the pink spots. Don't you think, dear?"—and she sidled up towards Gerty, and began to fidget with the buckle of her waist, her eyes cast down the while,—"don't you think, dear, that I should look nicer in my muslin?"

Gerty laughed. "Why, where is our strong-minded Grace, who used to profess such contempt for finery, and all the vanities?"

"Gone, Gerty, clean gone, I think," she replied, in a pitiful tone. "He is strong-minded enough for both; and since his strong arm has been round me, and his big, brave heart open to my own, I have felt so weak and happy, that I am afraid I shall never be strong-minded any more, —only don't tell him!"

Do not say "afraid," bonnie Grace Lee. Never regret the loss of that which made you less perfect woman, though you are committing deadly sin in the lovely eyes of the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyle and her set. If "dearest Francis" had heard your confession, you would, no doubt, have fallen greatly in the esteem of that exemplary young man. There are some even, I suppose, who, reading this part of your history, will think you soft, and sentimental, and Missyish. Let them! Nature was altogether wrong, wasn't she? when she ordained that woman's strength should be in her weakness. Go forth, ye strong-minded ones—*sans crinoline*—in blue spectacles, and stockings to match! regenerate the world, and turn the milk of human kindness sour with your vinegar aspects. Teach the so-called lords of the creation their proper places. Be lawyers,

doctors, statesmen, tax-collectors,—anything you like; but spinsters forever! Only when this flood of wisdom that you would bring about *does* cover the world, and demolish the sort of women some of us love and honor, and who wield a power over us,—that I have my doubts about your ever attaining,—then let an ark be made, in which a few Grace Lees may be preserved, in case it should turn out after all that they make the best Christians, wives, mothers, and friends.

And if there be a vacancy on board for a cabin-boy, let application be made to the publisher of this work for the address of a young man,—steady, honest, and obliging, with a good character from his last place,—who will be glad to accept the situation.

So Grace Lee came down to dinner in her white muslin with the pink spots; and the fish was boiled to rags, and the haunch of mutton overdone.



CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH POOR GRACE LEE'S NEW-BORN HOPES ARE SHIPWRECKED.

"CUDDY," said Mr. Treherne, as he rose, and was about to quit the dinner-table soon after the girls had left the room, "you will find more claret in the cellar. Captain Frankland, when you have quite done dessert, I should like to speak to you for a few moments, in my study."

"Holloa!" said Jackson, when the door close upon his host, "what's the matter?"

"Never you mind, Gigas," observed Cuddy, who was in the secret; "you go on eating those plums, and you shall have the cholera morbus, and be buried like a gentleman, to the great relief of your family."

Stevie lost no time in following Mr. Treherne, and found him deep in the mysteries of Bradshaw.

"My daughter Maud has told me, Captain Frankland," he said, "that you have made a proposal of marriage to our dear friend, Miss Lee, and that you have been so fortunate as to be accepted."

"You may, indeed, say fortunate, Sir. I would have told you of this myself, Sir; and so would Grace, I know, if we had had an opportunity."

"I am sure you would,—I am sure you would. I give you joy with all my heart; but there are other persons of more importance than I, my dear young friend, deep as is my interest in you both, to be informed and consulted with."

"I know what you mean. I am going to write to Mr. Coleman by this night's post, and so is Grace."

"Grace may write, my dear boy, but you must go and *see* him. You must go and see your parents, and consult them. There are so many things to be weighed and discussed on a subject like this, that if you were to write letters for a month you would not conclude anything properly. No! There is nothing like talking matters over face to face. Now I see here," he went on, pointing to his Bradshaw, "that the early train, which leaves Poundbridge at seven,"—poor Stevie winced. He had been thinking how nice it would be to show Grace, by the pleasant light of early morning, how it was that they had lost their way in the gloaming,—"arrives in London," continued Mr. Treherne, "just in time for you to catch the mid-day express. By this you can get home to dinner. You might have a long talk with Sir George in the evening, and a couple of hours next morning might suffice to arrange all that need at present be arranged with dear Grace's guardian."

"She is of age,—her own mistress in every respect. Mr. Coleman is only her trustee."

"Be it so. You know best. Still he must be consulted. Go then, my dear friend; and the quicker you are back, the better I shall be pleased; only you must excuse my saying that I cannot consent to your remaining in my house (under present circumstances) for one hour more than is absolutely necessary, until and unless everything is properly arranged, with the consent of your family and her—her trustee."

The rector's tone was very kind, but so firm, that Stevie gave in at once,—indeed, how could he do otherwise? "It is rather hard, you'll admit," he said, with a brighter smile than had lighted his eye for many a day, "to leave her so very soon; but you are quite right, Mr. Treherne, and I thank you much for your good counsel. I will see Mr. Coleman, and,—and I will undertake to bring you my father's consent to my marriage."

"That's capital,—capital! I should have thought very poorly of you if you had not felt it a great bore to go; and more poorly still if you had not made up

your mind to do what is right in the end. And now I will not keep you any longer from the drawing-room. God bless you, my dear young friend! If Grace had been my own child, I could not give her to you with more confidence or less regret. Ah, poor Charley!"

In the hall Stephen encountered Jackson, who seized him by the hand, and nearly dislocated three of his fingers in his herculean grasp. "Cuddy's told me," he whispered, "and,—and I ain't a clever fellow, you know, or eloquent and that, but I do wish you joy, Stevie; I do with all my heart. It seems like a good omen."

"Of what?"

Gigas blushed like a girl of sixteen, and began to stammer something about its bringing good back to the chambers; in the midst of which incoherent utterances, Stevie thanked him for his good wishes, and passed on.

The folks at Kernden Rectory were too kind and well-bred to say or do anything which could embarrass the happy lovers, and so the evening passed much as many of its predecessors had done; except that the pleasant circle of friends broke up and separated for the night rather earlier than usual, as though by common consent.

Grace retired to her room alone, wrote a short business-like letter to her trustee, and to Mrs. Coleman a long and affectionate epistle, in which she opened her heart to the jolly matron from whom she had received so many acts of kindness; and this done, took out her Bible and began to read, breaking off every now and then, as her mind *would* stray from the page, to wonder whether her happiness were real, or merely a dream, from which she should wake before the morning dawned.

It was long past midnight when a slim figure, draped in white, and which might have been taken for a ghost but for its rosy cheeks, glided into the room where the Treherne girls slept, and sat itself at the foot of the bed.

"Gerty, Gerty," it said, in a low voice, "are you awake, dear Gerty?"

This last appeal, in a louder tone, and accompanied by a shake, settled the question, and Gertrude and her sister sprang up together with cries of alarm.

"Oh, Grace! what has happened?" gasped Gerty.

"Don't say it's thieves!" said Maud, really frightened, and stopping her ears lest she should hear the dreaded word.

"No, no, dears; there is nothing the matter,—really nothing. I only came

to ask a question. I'm sorry I woke you. I thought that perhaps you were not *quite* asleep. I want to know, Gerty dear, if it would be very wrong, — if I might, — if there would be any harm, dearie, in my going down and giving him his breakfast. The carriage is ordered for him at six o'clock, and it will be so uncomfortable for him if there is no one up to make his tea."

"Bother him and his tea," cried Gerty, in assumed indignation. "You bad, wicked girl to come waking us out of our beauty-sleep about your wretched *him* and his breakfast! Go away! Avaunt, this moment!"

"Oh, but she would so like to see him off, Gerty," pleaded little Maud, "and it is so early for him to go. If it would not be right for her to go down alone, I'll get up now, — in time, Gracey? — and help her. Let me get up and dress."

"Well, I never supposed that two girls could make such fools of themselves as to get up in the middle of the night to bother about a man's breakfast. What, are there no servants in the house? They will give him his breakfast just as comfortably as you can."

"You did not think so when Cuddy left the last time, Gerty," replied Maud. "You made me get up to do propriety whilst you gave *him* his breakfast, and — no, I will not be smothered, — hold her off, Gracey. Oh, you ought to protect me when — Goodness, gracious! What's that?"

It was the sound of breaking glass, and Gerty, startled, desisted from the attempt to smother the tell-tale.

"Oh dear! it's thieves. I knew there were thieves," whimpered Maud, clinging to her sister.

"Nonsense, child. Thieves do not make such a noise as that. It's that great clumsy Mr. Jackson has poked something through his window."

"Mr. Jackson isn't clumsy," replied Maud. "Besides, his room is not on that side of the house."

"Hark! Some one is walking in the passage. It's Stevie's step, I know it," said Grace. "Hush, dear, don't cry," (this to the trembling Maud). "We are quite safe, even if it be thieves, now."

But still the three girls listened with painful anxiety for the sounds which followed. They heard Stevie descend the stairs, open the hall-door, and go out. They heard him rustling through the evergreens which grew under his window. They heard the latch of the iron gate

"click, click," as though he had gone out into the road. In about ten minutes, which seemed to them an hour, he returned, remounted the stairs softly, closed his door after him, and then all was silent as before.

"What *can* have happened?" said Grace, under her breath.

"Pho! nothing at all," replied Gertrude, sinking back upon her pillow. "As I said before, only of the wrong person, he's knocked something, — perhaps his horrid pipe, — through the window, and has gone down to fetch it. That's all."

"Perhaps so; but, oh! I do so wish the morning would come," sighed Grace.

"So do I, dear," Gerty rejoined, "as it seems that I am to have no more sleep. Well — ll! did it look vexed? Come, then, and be kissed and patted by its big child." And Gerty drew Grace to her side, and — was as good as her word. "And I'll tell you what we'll do," she said, after a while; "we'll all get up and give him his breakfast, and then no one can say anything."

Grace pressed her hand in silence, and soon afterwards left the room.

"How changed she is! — all in a moment, too, as it were," observed Maud, when the sisters were once more alone.

"She's happy, dear," was the reply. "Go to sleep."

Stephen Frankland smoked a couple of his muscular cheroots, with Cuddy and Gigas in the deserted kitchen, to the chirping of the crickets; and when at last he retired to his room, threw himself into an easy-chair, and thought of all the wise resolves which those simple words, "My poor, poor Stevie," had blown away into thin air, never again to settle, cloud-like, upon the clear horizon of his life. What a true adviser, what a prophet, was Gerty! He had shared his griefs and fears, and how much lighter, how much happier he was! Grace loved him through all, and in spite of all — *would* love him, as she had said with her own bright lips, more dearly, if possible, than before, if the sorrow and the shame he dreaded were to fall upon his house. Oh, he was a happy man that night! He made plans for the morrow. He would go straight, he thought, to Ruxton Court, settle all with Mr. Coleman, and get him to arrange the affair at "The Towers." He could not bear to see his father again, and it gave him a little trouble to think that the wedding must take place at the Colemans' house, when he reflected what Sir George

would be called upon to say and do upon the occasion. However, he consoled himself by the thought that the ordeal would only last for an hour or two, and would end by his carrying away Grace,—his first love,—to happier scenes, as his wife.

From these reflections he was roused by a crash of glass, and something hard and heavy fell on the table, and rolled from the table to the floor.

We know what followed. He went out, searched the shrubbery, and the garden, looked up and down the lane, but found no one, heard no sound, and so returned to his room.

"Some drunken tramp," he thought, "passing by, and seeing a light in the window, has thrown a stone at it."

But where was the stone?

Stephen searched where he had heard it fall, and found it. To his surprise, he saw that a folded paper was attached to it firmly by a piece of faded black ribbon. It was some time before he could undo the knots, and then he read what was written on the paper.

"This precious Stevie will miss his train if he does not make haste," said Gertrude Treherne to her sister, whilst busy making the tea for the breakfast of the departing guest. "Where's Grace?"

"Not down yet."

"Well, she's a nice girl, to wake people up in the middle of the night to get them to come down early with her, and not to make her appearance after all."

"Perhaps they are out in the garden together."

"No, Grace would not do that, I am sure. It seems so odd that *he's* not down. Oh, Williams," she said to the servant, as he entered with some dish, "have you called Captain Frankland?"

"Yes, Miss—more than an hour ago."

"And I knocked at Grace's door myself," said Maud, "and she answered me."

"What can she be doing?"

"If you please, Miss," interpolated Williams, "Elizabeth went up to Miss Lee's room about half an hour since with a letter."

"What! has the post come in already?"

"No, Miss. It was not a post letter."

"What was it, then? Who sent it?"

"I don't know, Miss. Perhaps Elizabeth—"

Gertrude did not wait to hear the rest, but sprang two stairs at a time up to Grace's room.

"Grace! Grace!" she cried, knocking at the door.

No answer!

"Oh, Grace, do say something! Grace?"

Still silence!

"Oh dear! what shall we do! what shall we do!" she cried, wringing her hands, whilst Maud, who had followed, stood by, wondering and asking what could have happened.

"Is anything wrong, Miss Treherne?" demanded Jackson, who at that moment appeared on the scene.

"Yes!—no!—that is—oh, Grace, do answer!"

"Good heavens! is Miss Lee ill? Where's Frankland?"

"Gone, Sir!" said the maid Elizabeth, from the foot of the stairs. "He left before five o'clock, and gave me a letter for Miss Lee, which I took up to her just now."

"In her room?"

"Yes, Sir."

Jackson rattled the door, and banged it with his knuckles loud enough to wake the dead. It was locked inside.

"Miss Lee!—answer, pray! Your friends are dreadfully anxious. Miss Lee!!!"

No sound in reply.

"Shall I break open the door?"

"Oh yes! please do—now at once!" cried Gerty.

Gigas just seemed to lean his shoulder against the door, and in it flew.

They found Grace completely dressed, sitting on the floor, and staring at them as they entered, but with no sight in her gaze. Staring, pale as ashes, through them, past them, into vacancy—staring as a corpse might stare into futurity.

Gertrude and Maud flung themselves upon the ground beside her, twined their arms round her, called her by every endearing name. They could not rouse her. They brought every sort of restorative, and forced them upon her—in vain! Nothing that they could do averted that stony, lack-lustre stare into vacancy. She let them raise her to her feet. She let Jackson lift her—and he did it tenderly—and carry her to her bed. She let the girls take off the pretty dress—never worn before—which she had put on that morning because it was a color that Stevie liked. She let the doctor come and feel her pulse, and shake his head over her. She even murmured "Thank you" now and again, as little services were rendered her; but still,

through all, that horrid vague stare into vacancy!

At last, Mr. Treherne noticed that she held something clinched in one of her hands. They opened it as gently as they could — she not resisting — and found there the letter she had received, crushed up. A wild, blotted, incoherent scrawl, in what might be the ghost of Stephen Frankland's handwriting, in which he bade her to think of him no more; to fancy all that he had said to her of love and marriage as folly, nonsense, untruth — anything but what she had taken it to be. Praying her to forget him, to pray for him, to hate him, if it must be, but to forget him then and forever!

And where was the writer? Hurrying away towards Rawthorne Castle, the first place he had thought of when the horror revealed by the letter attached to the stone had burst upon him, and driven him in despair from the house, as though it had been the very brink of doom. For the words it contained — written in a cramped female hand, but cruelly clear and plain — were these: —

"A merciful providence enables me to save you from a fearful fate. Beware! The woman with whom you were walking in the wood this day is she whom John Brandron came from India to make a liar and a profligate acknowledge as his child. She is your own father's child, Stephen Frankland, so help me God. — MARY ALETON."

The first person that Stephen encountered on the platform of the little railway-station that was nearest to Rawthorne Castle, was no less a personage than Sampson Lagger.

"You here!" Stephen exclaimed. "Why have you not communicated with me, as you promised?"

"Because I have been too busy, Sir, with my own business, to be able to attend to yours," replied the detective, firmly returning Frankland's angry gaze. "Before I am a day older, I shall lay my hand on the murderer of John Everett Brandron!"

Stephen staggered back aghast.

"He — he is not here," he gasped, not knowing what he said.

"I know he isn't," replied the detective; "leastwise, not *yet*, but he will be before nightfall. Lord bless you, Sir, I have him as safe this moment as though he were under lock and key in Maidstone jail. I'm sorry for you, Sir, I am indeed, but dooty's dooty, and must be done."

CHAPTER XXX.

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF — BY SETTLEMENT.

IT was not with unalloyed satisfaction that our "dearest Francis" looked back upon his half-brother's final departure from Tremlett Towers. Not that he regretted it. His bitter jealousy of Stevie made him rejoice in the assurance that the house and the county had seen the last of him; and his own conceit was too great to let him suppose for a moment that what he had said and done was not the sole cause of so agreeable a result. Why, then, was not his lofty mind at ease? Was he a little ashamed of his conduct towards his father — of his cold-heartedness towards a brother who had loved him with such an enduring, manly love? Not a bit of it! He acted throughout *upon principle*; and eloquent were the arguments, most convincing the logic, with which he assured himself that he had behaved in an exemplary manner. Still he was not quite at his ease. He was one of those persons who do mean and disagreeable things "upon principle" only where there is something in the nature of interest to be gained thereby. There was a set-off against the exit of the rebel Stevie, and Mr. Tremlett regretted exceedingly that he had not got rid of him on easier terms.

The fact was, that, for about the first time in her life, Lady Tremlett had shown some feeling. We have seen that she supposed Stephen's absence would only be a temporary one. Had she not encountered him on that stormy autumn morning, whilst walking down to the railway-station, with his carpet-bag in his hand? Had he not smiled, and kissed her in his old, tender, protecting way, when she begged him to make haste back to them again? My Lady burst into such a rage as those who knew her best never dreamed that she could be capable of, when she learned the truth. How dared they deceive her! How dared they drive him out of her house! — yes, *her* house! He was her only friend; the only one she loved of them all. They were all bad, wicked, crafty designers. She would leave them, and go and live with dear Stevie. Where had he gone? They *must* know. Would he come back? Oh, let somebody go — let Sir George go — and ask him to come back! The poor Baronet shook his head, and assured his excited wife that it would be no use (he did not tell her *why*).

Stephen had left what was once his home, forever. At this news My Lady's rage melted into a flood of tears, and all day long she sat sobbing, wringing her hands, and moaning, "Oh, Stevie, Stevie, why did you go? why did you leave me now? What shall I do! oh, what will become of me! Oh, Stevie, if you only knew! Oh, Stevie, Stevie, save me! Oh, let me go to Stevie!"

It was not altogether love for the absent one, however, which drew these lamentations from the pretty lips of Rhoda, Lady Tremlett.

"Dearest Francis" did not show his wisdom in approaching his mother whilst in this mood, and assuring her of his complete devotion to her and — his mean little mind could not help adding — her interests.

"Oh yes — yes, I know," replied his mother, impatiently; "but you are not like Stevie. I'm not wise and strong like some people; and I used to lean on him so. He was not like a son; and, oh, why did he leave me now, when I am so sorely tem — ?" and My Lady burst into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

"Let me be your support — lean on me," cooed the dear fellow, in his most insinuating tones, when this had slightly subsided; but his mother shrank from him with a strange, wild look in her eyes.

"You!" she cried, "you! Oh, no, no, no! You, so cold and cruel — you take Stevie's place? never! And if it had not been for you, and your nasty crafty ways — I know what you want — he would be here now to take care of me. Oh, it was cruel of him to go — cruel, cruel; but you — now mark what I say, Francis — you'll repent this. You will! You'll repent it all your life, if you have a heart — if you ever loved your wretched mother."

"It is because I love you so dearly, that I have adopted a course of conduct towards my half-brother which at present you condemn," said he. "I am aware that I shall be misjudged, and perhaps condemned for what I have done," he added, with martyr-like resignation; "but the fear of blame from the frivolous and the worldly-minded has never yet dissuaded me from acting upon principle. You who are so good, and kind, and straightforward, think that all the world is the same. Ah, my dear mother, to what lengths might not your confiding nature have taken you!" and the dear fellow lifted his eyes and hands in depreciation of the sad result.

"Do you dare to suggest that Stevie

is not good, and kind, and straightforward?"

"My dear mother, you must remember that he is my father's son."

"Oh that he had been mine — my own, very own!" sobbed My Lady; "or that my own had been like him!"

"My dearest mother," said her son, taking her hand, as Steevie would have done, to soothe her, "how can you speak thus, when I — ?"

"Don't say you love me — don't tell lies, Francis Tremlett," she burst out, angrily. "You know you do not love me, or your father, or anybody but yourself. You would not be a Tremlett if you did. We are all cold, selfish, false-hearted. I love no one — only — only Stevie. I hate myself — I am afraid of myself. Oh, if I had him here to uphold me! my noble, strong, generous Stevie! Oh, if I only had Stevie, to save me from sin and sorrow — to save me from myself! It is your fault; yes, yours — yours," she cried, again turning upon her son. "There will be no one who will repent it so bitterly as you will; for if it had not been for you, he would never have — he must have gone — he could not — he — Oh, if Stevie — " But what My Lady might have added was checked by a violent fit of hysterics, in the midst of which she was carried off to her room, whence she emerged no more that day.

It was sad that My Lady found nothing to complain of in her son's conduct towards his father.

Mr. Tremlett was slightly puzzled to make out what his mother could mean by calling on Stevie to *save her*; but his attention was chiefly directed to her threat, that he would one day repent his conduct towards Stevie. "Confound it!" he mused, "she's going to leave him that money," — alluding to the odd thousands of ready money that were at My Lady's disposal by will — "but she must be brought round; Stephen might make improper use of it; besides, it is so bad for a professional man not to be dependent on his profession. He gets so careless and unambitious if he has anything else to rely upon."

Thus did the dear fellow console himself; but to his surprise he found that his mother — hitherto so plastic in his hands, so forgetful one day of what had caused her pleasure or pain on the day before — was not be brought round. On the contrary, her moans after Stevie, her entreaties that some one would bring him back to her — poor, weak, helpless thing, she never thought of acting for herself in the

matter which she had so much at heart — increased as the time went on, whenever she found herself alone with her husband or her son. The former could not help her — the latter would not.

This, you may be sure, made her son very uncomfortable; nor was it all he had to trouble him. He felt that he had made a great mistake in that unpleasant affair between his father and Messrs. Puddle and Snap. He had held the ace of trumps in his hand, and had let Stephen win the game with a trumpery four! The old, vulgar Tremlett love of money, as money, had got into his eyes and blinded him. It was not in the nature of Francis Tremlett to think himself a fool; but he admitted, in his own mind, that it would have been much better for him if he had not acted "upon principle" this time, and had let his mother pay the debt and costs — better even to have paid them himself, than to have given so cheap a triumph to Stevie, and through him to his father.

To his great discomfort the latter made no secret of his arrest. Lord Rossthorne — whose gout had got better — came down to luncheon that very day, and was admiring the horses in Lady Tremlett's carriage, as it stood at the porch ready for her to take her afternoon drive with the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyn, and the lady of Professor Spraggle.

"Yes," observed Sir George, bitterly, "they are very handsome — thorough-bred, of course! They cost four hundred guineas, a sum which was not forthcoming this morning to save me from a jail."

"A what?" exclaimed the peer.

"Father," cried dearest Francis, in an agony, "pray —"

But Sir George did not heed the exhortation, or attend to the gestures — now threatening, now entreating — of his son. He continued quite calmly,

"Yes, a jail! You would not think it to look at this house — the magnificent country-seat of Sir George Tremlett, Baronet, as the guide-books call it," he said, with bitterness, "and at all that rich and fertile land about, all pouring in its rents regularly four times a year in thousands; you would not think, I say, that I was arrested here this morning for a debt of some four hundred pounds, and had not four hundred shillings to pay it with."

"Disgraceful!" muttered Mr. Tremlett.

"What's disgraceful?" echoed his father, who had determined to humiliate him; "that I should not have four hundred shillings? Four hundred shillings make twenty pounds, and how can you expect a

man whose whole annual income is only £150, to have so much in his pocket in the middle of a quarter? You are unreasonable, Francis." There was an irony in this — said before the peer — which cut the dear fellow like the stroke of a whip, and made him flinch again.

"But the arrest, the arrest," impatiently interposed Lord Rossthorne. "I do not understand — how — who — You are not now —"

"I will explain all," Sir George interrupted, "in good time."

"I really do not see the necessity of any explanation," pleaded Mr. Tremlett; "the thing is past and over. It is a very disagreeable subject — why not let it drop?"

"Because, Sir," rejoined his father, sternly, "you have used the word 'disgraceful' in connection with my conduct in the affair, before one of the oldest friends I have, and so I choose to explain."

"If you like to expose yourself —" began dearest Francis, getting very hot.

"Silence, Sir!" said Lord Rossthorne, in a subdued voice, and not a shade of violence in the gesture, but still with a tone and manner which would have cowed a bolder man than Francis Tremlett; "your father is speaking to me. — You were arrested this morning for four hundred pounds?" he continued to Sir George, as though there were no such person as his second son in existence.

"There or thereabouts — the amount is no matter. It was the residue, my Lord, of an old loan of £1200, contracted by me more than twenty years ago, for — for a purpose which I need not mention. You know what my position was about that time. I was a rich man, as it were, yesterday, and a beggar at post-time this morning. Well, I borrowed this money. Was there anything disgraceful in that? Nobody supposed that those cursed mines could not have been pumped out dry, and that I should have been a rich man again. I might have become a bankrupt, and wiped off all my liabilities; but I did not. I wish to God now I had. Is there any thing disgraceful in that? I ran away with an heiress; and out of her three hundred thousand pounds, they gave me, knowing my tastes and habits — the habits and tastes of a gentleman — they gave me one hundred and fifty pounds a year. That was how they went to work to make old Mark Tremlett's daughter and Joshua Tremlett's niece love and honor me as my wife, and prepare a happy future for us. You know," he went on, in a lower tone,

"what money I have had from you. I have borrowed a hundred or two from Coleman ; and with this, and what I have saved from my income, I have paid off upwards of two thousand pounds' worth of debts, and have still kept my club, and looked, I hope, like a gentleman. I have not spent fifty pounds a year upon myself. Is there anything 'disgraceful' in that ?"

"You owe my mother ninety-three pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, that you have borrowed from her from time to time," interposed Mr. Tremlett, in a sulky tone, determined that his father should not have more credit than he could help. "If you *will* go into disagreeable subjects, you must admit you have had that to spend too ; besides, all your debts were paid for you when you married my mother."

"You are a young man, a very young man, Mr. Tremlett," observed the peer, deliberately, with a shade — just a shade — of contempt in his tone ; "but if you should live to be a hundred, I doubt if you will ever know a man who has had *all* his debts paid for him ; that is to say, if the discharge of all, by some other, depends upon the confession of all by himself."

"I admit that it requires more moral courage than we find in ordinary people, to avoid making some small concealments," said dear Francis, delighted at the prospect of an argument with the peer ; "but two thousand pounds — to say nothing of the ninety-three pounds seventeen and sixpence — is a large sum, and —"

"And what ?" demanded Lord Rossthorne, sternly.

"I insist upon investigating if such a sum has been really paid," was the reply.

"By what right ?"

The question was an obvious and a simple one ; but this dutiful son found some difficulty in answering it. His power in his mother's house had been gained gradually. The poor Baronet — the nominal possessor of Tremlett Towers, the sham great landlord and influential squire — had given way at first to small aggressions made by his second son, when that philosopher returned from Oxford for his first long vacation, bursting with the importance and wisdom usually imbibed by young gentlemen of his stamp during their freshman's term. It was then that he first began to realize his position as heir, and that of his father as a pensioner on his mother's bounty. He was a true Tremlett, was Master Francis, and added to the commandment, "Honor thy father and mother," the

words, "provided always that they are rich, and have something to leave you in their wills." The idea of the absolute inheritor of fifteen thousand a year being expected to honor a parent whose income was only a few pounds better than that of the butler, never entered his head. The feeling that it would be just and kind and generous, to uphold a gentleman of ancient family in such unfortunate dependency, and, by treating him with respect, win for him the respect of others, was not such a one as was likely to enter the mind of a Tremlett.

No ; dearest Francis suddenly discovered that his mother's wishes had not been properly consulted in the management of affairs, and very soon succeeded in convincing her that she had been a very ill-used and neglected woman. In an evil hour the poor Baronet gave way — for the sake of peace and quietness, as he said ; his dutiful son followed up his advantage relentlessly, and that false step of Sir George's was never recovered. He struggled hard, but it was no use. My Lady could not be troubled with complaints of dear Francis ; they made her quite ill. My Lady must really request that Sir George would not interfere with what dear Francis was doing for the estate — dearest Francis was so very clever. Besides, what could it signify to Sir George what was done to the estate ? Sometimes, when father and son came to hard words in her presence, she would burst into tears, and declare that they were killing her. This generally took place when her son was decidedly in the wrong. With two to one against him — with active invasion of his authority on the one hand, and passive resistance against his complaints on the other, what could Sir George do — himself of a weak and temporizing disposition — but give in, and be gradually drawn back, and back, and back, till he became the miserable cipher that we beheld him on the eve of that eventful journey to Parliament Street, *via* Westborough ?

Such was the process under which Mr. Tremlett had elevated himself into the position from which he presumed to discredit his father's statement that he had paid two thousand pounds' worth of debts since his marriage ; but Lord Rossthorne's question — short, sharp, and to the point — did not admit of an answer.

"By what right, Sir," the peer repeated, "do you insist upon investigating whether such a sum has been really paid ?"

Dear Francis, who had got very red in the face, and looked exceedingly awkward, stammered out, —

"Because he — Sir George — says — or rather insinuates, that — that my mother has not — that the allow — the income, I mean, that he gets is not — not enough. That — in short, that my mother has not been liberal towards him, when —"

"The question, then," interrupted the peer, sharply, "is one between your parents, according to your own showing."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Tremlett, thinking that his drift was now understood, and that he should be allowed to continue the investigation.

"Then who made you — their son — a judge between them?" replied Lord Rossthorne, severely. "For shame, young man! If, after what has passed, you think proper to remain a witness to what your father has yet to explain respecting this arrest, I cannot, of course, command your absence; but you will have the goodness to remember that the conversation is between your father and myself, and I must request that it may not again be interrupted."

It would have been well for the dear fellow if he had taken the hint and left the room; but, as I have said before, his mental cuticle was uncommonly tough. He only thought that Lord Rossthorne desired to be alone with Sir George, and therefore remained in order to annoy him. The annoyance, however, was quite the other way, when his father came to recount Stephen's share in the transactions of the morning. Then he saw the peer's noble countenance light up with pleasure, and heard the few eloquent words in which he expressed his admiration of our Stevie's act, and the way in which he had performed it. This was gall and wormwood to Mr. Tremlett, and the one contemptuous glance with which the old lord regarded him from head to foot, when his father told, in a choking voice, how Stevie had left them, never to return again, gave his half-brother plenty to think of for the rest of the day. Assuredly he was paying rather dearly for his triumph. But the worst had not come yet.

At dinner the following day, before all the company, his father — taking a mean advantage of the presence of his ally, Lord Rossthorne — told him — him, Mr. Tremlett, M. P., in prospect, and J. P. in fact, the guide and philosopher, if not the friend of all the country side — that he did not know what he was talking about, and had better change the conversation! Here was revolution and anarchy with a vengeance. True it was that he had introduced the subject in question on purpose to annoy the Baronet; but little did he

anticipate such a burst of insubordination.

He began the conversation by delighting the company with an account of certain additions he was about to make to the pleasure-gardens, and informed them that he had engaged a new gardener — highly recommended by the Duke of Devonshire — to superintend the laying out of the fresh ground. It was delightful to hear the dear fellow mouthing out his *I's* at his father's table, and bragging about what *I* am going to do with this or that, and how much it is to cost *me*.

"And this man," he added, alluding to the gardener, "I shall lodge in that cottage that you remarked the other day, my dear Mrs. Corbyle; do not you remember? I mean the lodge that leads out of the park into the Derby road."

"And what is to become of Bill Grant?" asked Sir George, putting down his knife and fork in astonishment.

"Grant has for many years ceased to be of any service to me. He must make way for others."

"But what on earth is he to do if he be deprived of a home? His pension is barely sufficient to provide him with food, and he cannot work!" expostulated Sir George.

"He must claim those rights which the laws of his country afford to poor people in his situation," replied Mr. Tremlett, in a pompous tone.

"Go to the workhouse, I suppose you mean?"

"Precisely!"

"He'd starve first!" exclaimed the Baronet, excitedly. "He was born in that lodge, and his father was head-keeper there before him. You cannot mean what you say."

"My dear father," simpered his son, "you have given me two admirable reasons, not only for meaning what I say, but for carrying out strictly what I mean. In the first place, I am determined to uproot that absurd idea which seems to prevail on the estate, that because I may happen to be satisfied with the conduct of some person in my employment, I am to be saddled with his family. I presume that Grant's father was paid his wages regularly whilst he was head-keeper; and I know that Grant himself has no complaint to make in that respect."

"It is really quite wonderful to see how careful dearest Francis is in seeing that all the men are paid," commented Lady Tremlett; and all Mr. Tremlett's friends agreed that it was a monstrous thing for families to expect successive employment,

or to expect to retain in their old age the cottages in which they were born.

"As to this man Grant refusing parochial relief," continued the orator, "all I can say is, that if he does so, he deserves to starve. I have no sympathy for that foolish pride in the poor, which causes them to regard with aversion the assistance provided for them in times of distress by the institutions of their country."

"Nor I either," replied the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Theodosius Corbyle, to whom the above observation was made. "As a clergyman's wife, I cannot too strongly reprobate such stiff-neckedness. They ought to be humble, and contented with their lot," concluded the lady, piously, sipping her iced champagne; "besides, the workhouses are very comfortable."

"Delightful!" echoed Lady Tremlett; "I went all over ours the other day—or a year or two ago, perhaps it was—and tasted the soup, and really it was excellent!"

"Humph!" said her husband; "how would you like to dine off nothing else for a month?"

"Nonsense, George! how can you be so ridiculous?" retorted My Lady; "of course, they have other things for dinner besides soup. Roast beef and plum-pudding, and that every day; and when Grant goes, I dare say there would be no objection to the keeper letting him have some game. I don't mean partridges and pheasants, you know; only rabbits and weasels, and things that are not quite wanted in the house."

Even Mr. Tremlett could not help smiling at his mother's idea of workhouse fare, and, fearing a reply from Lord Rossthorne, was not sorry when the subject was changed. Mr. Tremlett returned to his improvements, Colonel Vincent Champneys told a wonderful story or two, and then Professor Spraggle asked if any one had heard how the vacant living of Questerthorpe had been filled up by the Crown.

"I have heard nothing *official*," replied dearest Francis, "but Carlton Chamberlayne is sure to get it!" and this was said with the air of a man who speaks from authority.

"I am sorry to say that my young friend Carlton's chance is anything but secure," said the professor. "Just before dressing for dinner I received a letter from a person usually well informed on these subjects, and he tells me that the preferment is likely to be offered to a gentleman of the name of Treherne, whom I find by the Clergy List holds a little living down in Kent."

The Francis-ites were shocked; for the aforesaid Carlton was of their set.

"Why, it's worth twelve hundred a year!" said Mrs. Corbyle.

"Besides the glebe land," added her husband.

"And such a charming rectory!" observed Lady Tremlett.

"With so much good society all about," added the professor.

"Has the late incumbent resigned?" asked Colonel Vincent Champneys.

"Resigned? oh dear, no! Poor old gentleman, he's dead; he died about a month ago."

"Having been all but imbecile for the last twelve years, if I remember aright," interposed Lord Rossthorne, in his quiet, smiling way.

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Spraggle; "he has not done duty for many years, but he kept two curates, and his nephew officiated occasionally."

"Dear, dear, dear," said Mrs. Corbyle, sorrowfully; "what a shame not to give the living to poor Carlton! and he such a good young man, with such claims too."

"Too bad! too bad!" struck in dearest Francis.

"Scandalous!" exclaimed Roundleby, who had an uncle with a rectory, and was going into the Church.

"Shameful!" echoed Mr. Octavius Flounder, because his patron had said it was "too bad."

"Just shows what you are to expect from the present Government," observed Colonel Champneys, who liked to be well with the majority.

"I knew something of the family once," said Lord Rossthorne, after a pause, "but have lately lost sight of it; tell me, please, what were Mr. Carlton Chamberlayne's claims?"

"My dear Lord," replied Mrs. Spraggle, "his uncle was Rector of Questerthorpe for forty-three years!"

"At twelve hundred a-year, beside the glebe," rejoined the peer dryly; "but I wanted to know *young* Mr. Chamberlayne's claims."

"He is a gentleman of family, and an accomplished scholar," replied Mr. Tremlett, in his loftiest tone.

"More so than Mr. Treherne?"

"Nobody seems ever to have heard of him," said Francis, with a sneer.

"Or even read of him?" inquired the peer, with a malicious twinkle in his eye.

Mr. Tremlett's evil star was in the ascendant, and he said, "No!" whereupon Lord Rossthorne counted upon his fingers

seven learned and standard treatises of which Mr. Treherne—our old friend at Kernden—was the author. The dead silence which followed was broken by Lady Tremlett, who observed that “if he could write all those books, why did he not mind his business, and write some more? Why could he not leave the Chamberlaynes alone? But of course poor dear Mrs. Chamberlayne would continue to live in the rectory?”

“Oh no,” said the clergyman’s wife; “the new people will turn her out, and be as disagreeable as possible besides, I dare say.” Mrs. Corbyle knew how disagreeable “new people” could be, for her husband had brought in a bill of two hundred pounds against the widow of his predecessor, for “dilapidations,” because he had added a conservatory and a study to the rectory-house.*

“But will she really have to go?” asked My Lady, opening wide her pretty blue eyes.

“Certainly! That is the cruelty of the thing,” replied dearest Francis; “when, if the Premier had presented her nephew, she could have remained in the house which has been her home for thirty years.”

“I did not catch how long Bill Grant has lived in the East Lodge?” asked Lord Rossthorne of Sir George.

“He was born there. He’s now fifty-five,” was the reply.

“In-deed!” said the peer.

I do not know what may be the feelings of mice when, having entered a trap, they hear the click of the spring as the catch closes behind them, and they become aware of their unpleasant situation; but I should imagine them to be very similar to those which entered the breast of Mr. Francis Tremlett and his friends, when that sonorous “in-deed” of Lord Rossthorne was heard.

There was an awful pause.

“If—if,” stammered Francis, “your lordship means to suggest that there is anything in common between the case of my former gamekeeper and—and—”

“I do not remember having drawn any comparison at all,” said the peer, very quietly, enjoying his discomfiture.

“But you have insinuated—”

“What?”

“That there is some similarity between—”

“Between what?” pursued his tormentor.

* An addition is a “dilapidation” in the eye of the ecclesiastical law.

“Why, the case of my old keeper and that of—I hardly like to couple persons so very dissimilar—of Mrs. Chamberlayne.”

“Well, now you remind me of it,” said Lord Rossthorne, “I think there is much in common between them. Don’t you think so, Lady Tremlett?”

“You are joking!” laughed My Lady. “Why, Mrs. Chamberlayne is the granddaughter of an earl; and that dreadful old paralytic Grant is—is—oh, a very common man.”

“Ah! I see now,” said the peer, good-humoredly; “that makes the difference. Common people do not mind being turned out of the homes in which they were born; and the families of gentlemen—of twelve hundred a-year, besides the glebe—living in beautiful rectories, have a claim in respect of the services of their relatives. Thank you, my dear Lady Tremlett; but where do you draw the line? Is there any love for a home that is only worth fifty pounds a-year?”

My Lady replied that she did not want to draw any lines. Anybody could see that it was very cruel to turn poor dear Mrs. Chamberlayne out of her nice house. Then her son came to her aid, and began to argue that poor people had no feelings, or very coarse ones; that Bill Grant’s feelings were as the fustian of his jacket, and those of the rector’s widow as the lace of her wedding-veil; and talked such utter, wicked, wanton trash, that his father lost patience, and, emboldened by the events of the day before, bade him hold his tongue or change the conversation.

Assuredly Mr. Tremlett was getting somewhat roughly handled all of a sudden; and he was not the sort of man to submit to such usage without meditating revenge.

In spite of all Stephen had said respecting Colonel Champneys—or rather, I think, because he had warned his family against him—that gentleman remained a welcome guest at the Towers. What an agreeable, well-spoken, unselfish person he was, to be sure! Mrs. Spraggle was delighted with him—he spoke so respectfully of university Dons and their wives. Mr. Roundleby, who in his secret heart was inclined to be a fast young man, declared some time afterwards, when he had lapsed from dear Francism, that Tremlett’s friends were all infernal prigs—all but Champneys, who was a regular brick; and the Honorable and Reverend Mrs. Corbyn assured her bishop’s lady that, as

a clergyman's wife, she had set her face against all officers in the army, believing them to be an unregenerate set; but that she had modified her views since becoming acquainted with the Colonel. He was so serious and thoroughly Christian, was this Colonel Vincent Champneys.

The object of these somewhat contradictory encomiums was not less satisfied with his admirers than they were with him. He was the sort of man who got intimate with you very soon. Introduced to you yesterday, as it were, you found him calling you by your Christian name to-day. Thus Mr. Spraggle soon became "my dear professor;" Mr. Roundleby, "Sam;" and the two young country justices (who were always shooting) respectively "Mat." and "Charlie." The Colonel very rarely addressed himself to Sir George; in fact, he treated him with scant civility. Towards My Lady he was attention itself; and always spoke to and of her son as *Mr. Tremlett*. Oh, the Colonel knew what he was about!

Dearest Francis was not slow in making his guests aware of the position held by his father in Tremlett Towers, and a very few hours sufficed to teach the Colonel what was expected of one who wished to be well with the heir. This alone would have induced him to treat the poor Baronet in an off-hand, semi-contemptuous manner; but Sir George had been asking him certain questions, unpleasant to hear and difficult to answer, and therefore he determined to put him down. This was not so easily done.

The spell which had given over the once gay and proud George Frankland, bound hand and foot, to the mercy of his rich wife and her methodical son and heir, was one which has made slaves of many better men than he, and crushed their faces into the dust, before meaner scoundrels even than Mr. Francis Tremlett. It was that which is woven by the demon DEBT — a fiend who produces more lies, and tricks, and meannesses, I think, than any other devil in or out of the pit. Once let his clutch fasten upon you, and good-by to self-respect; good-by to peace; good-by even to exertion; for — unless, perhaps, with the very strongest of us — he paralyzes the powers which might be used to throw him off. For years he had sat constantly on Sir George Tremlett's heart — he and another enemy to peace; but in the relief which the Baronet felt, when by Stephen's act he was released from the one, he almost forgot the other, although Stephen himself had warned him

that his secret was no longer his own. It may be, that when he did remember this, it made him restless, and led him to say and do things which would have cost him a shudder to contemplate a week ago. One of these was to investigate the truth of what his eldest son had hinted respecting Colonel Vincent Champneys. He cross-examined that gentleman so acutely respecting certain statements which he had made about himself and his services, and pressed him so closely as to his right of assuming a military title in England, that the popular gentleman had no resource but to be insolent, and so broke off the conversation. Upon this the Baronet sought his wife in her pretty boudoir, and told her Stephen's misgivings and his own more than suspicions, that the pretended colonel was not a fit person to associate with them, and readily convinced her that it was so.

"Oh, yes," said My Lady, more earnestly than was her wont; "I am sure that he is a wicked, bad man, and he ought to go. Why don't he go? Tell him to go, please."

This resolution having been imparted to her son, he also had an interview with My Lady, the result of which was, that he assured Sir George, the next time they met, that it was all a mistake; that the Colonel was a most exemplary person; and that she had asked dearest Francis to request that he would prolong his visit at "the Towers."

At this juncture it was only necessary for the Baronet to express a wish, however proper or simple, to set "dearest Francis" up in opposition to it. The reader is aware that the "dear fellow" was not so thoroughly as heretofore in his mother's favor, but his father was in deeper disgrace. You will have noticed that in all her complaints against Francis for having caused his brother's departure, she never once alluded to her son's conduct towards his father, which had so roused honest Stevie's indignation.

"How dare he go and get arrested!" she cried, petulantly. "If he had not got into debt, and made those horrid men come after him, there would not have been all that fuss, and dear Stevie would have remained; and, oh! what shall I do with out him, now that — Oh, Stevie, Stevie! come back, come back!"

Mr. Tremlett was not one to test the accuracy of his mother's logic. Anything would do that brought blame upon the poor Baronet; and when his wife's mind was most bitter against him, his amiable

son told her what had passed between Sir George and Lord Rossthorne, and discussed with her the alleged payment of that two thousand pounds, armed with the schedule of debts which had been paid on the Baronet's marriage. A long telltale list, this. It contained (beside the names of bill discounters and money lenders, and the sums due to them) statements from wine-merchants, horse-dealers, butchers and bakers, confectioners, and other household tradesmen; half a dozen tailors', as many jewellers' and bootmakers', a silk mercer or two, a *milliner's*, and four dressmakers' bills.

"It seems odd," remarked Mr. Tremlett, "that these milliners and dressmakers' bills, are dated *after* the death of the late Lady Frankland. I suppose they were incurred for my brother. There are no items given, but is not £293 18s. 7d. rather an extravagant sum to spend in one year upon the dress of a little boy of six?"

Lady Tremlett turned deadly pale, and trembled as her son spoke.

"It *seems*," he continued, "as though every possible extravagance were included in this list. Look over it, my dearest mother, and see if you can suggest any liability which my father is likely to have had, and which is not entered there."

My Lady looked it through, paying especial attention to the mysterious milliners' and dressmakers' accounts, and could not help her son to guess at any further debts.

"And yet he says that he had to borrow twelve hundred pounds just before his marriage with you," Francis continued, "which is not mentioned here; and that he has paid nearly two thousand pounds' worth of debts — he *calls* them debts — since."

He placed so much stress upon the word in italics, that his mother demanded what he meant. "What should your father pay people money for," she asked, "unless he owed it?"

Mr. Tremlett looked wise, and shook his head.

"Don't shake your head," said she, peevishly — My Lady had been very peevish lately — "it unakes me quite nervous to see people shake their heads. Why don't you answer?"

"My dear mother," replied Francis, "I really do not like — it is not for me to accuse my father."

"Accuse him! Oh, dear! what do you accuse him of?"

"I? Of nothing. It would be very wrong of me to accuse him at all. I only suspect —"

"What? what?"

"Dearest mother," he rejoined, imitating, as far as he could, Stevie's caressing voice and manner, "let us talk of something more pleasant."

"No," said My Lady, resolutely, "I will have an answer. What do you suspect?"

"It is not right that I should tell you," was the reply, delivered in a low and solemn voice.

"Yes, but it is; and you are very wicked if you do not tell me this moment," said My Lady, getting more and more excited. "I must and will know."

"Well, if you *must*, you must; but mind, I only suspect. My father's debts were all paid on his marriage; he cannot, he does not pretend they were not. What has he to show for all this money he says he has paid? Nothing. Painful as it is for me to come to any conclusion in such a case, I can form but one; and that is, that my father has some person or persons dependent upon him, of whom we know nothing; and that these sums, and others which he has borrowed of Lord Rossthorne, have gone in supporting them in secret."

Lady Tremlett heaved a deep sigh, and sinking back upon her sofa, did not speak again.

That afternoon, as on the two previous ones, the family barouche was given up to the use of the guests. My Lady took an airing in her pony carriage, and was driven, as before, by Colonel Vincent Champneys. He was, as I have said, all attention and politeness to his hostess; there was something even chivalrous in his deference towards her; but she trembled and shrank from him when he addressed her, though she could never keep her eyes off his face when they were in the same company. The expression of her gaze was that of some poor bird fascinated by a serpent, and being drawn nearer and nearer to its doom.

It was almost dark that evening when they entered the park, returning home. Their drive had been a long one.

Just before they drove up to the door, Colonel Champneys said, as though remarking upon something that his companion had been saying, "Your son is right. I have reasons to know that his suspicions are well founded. Rhoda," he added, almost sternly, looking her full in the face with his cold, glittering gray eyes, "have I not told you that this is not your destiny? You are made to be loved, to love, and be happy. You are not happy here,

Rhoda. Your destiny is elsewhere, and with another."

My Lady hung down her head, and was silent. This took place on the day but one before Stephen fled from Kernden Rectory as narrated in the last chapter. Ah, Stevie, old friend! if you had known then — even then, in the hour of your deepest agony — the retribution which hung over the heads of those who had driven you from your home, you would have forgiven all, and hurried to their aid. But so it was not to be.



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HARDEST KNOT OF ALL.

LORD ROSSTHORNE was from home when Stephen arrived at the castle, but was expected to return in the course of the day. He had left early in the morning by rail, without luggage, and had taken a ticket for B——, which was the nearest station on the main line, the railroad which passed close to Rossthorne being merely a "feeder." Whether their master had booked again at the junction, and, if so, whither he had gone, none of the servants could tell; but he had ordered dinner for two, and a bed to be prepared for a gentleman who was to accompany him home. He had received a telegraphic despatch about half an hour before he left.

Stephen had been expected, as we know, for some time; and even if he had not, his arrival would have caused no apparent commotion in that well-managed household. My Lord's "own man" conducted him to the rooms he was to occupy, and respectfully inquired for his luggage. Had Captain Frankland left it at the station? If so, would he please to give him (the valet) the tickets, and it should be sent for. Stephen stammered out something about not having come to make any stay — merely wishing to speak to Lord Rossthorne for a few minutes — no; he had not any luggage to be sent for. The man begged to be excused if he presumed — he was sure he did not mean any disrespect — but had anything happened? — was Captain Frankland ill? — would he take anything? Stephen assured him that there was nothing amiss — he was quite well — he was much obliged, but would take nothing; only —. The well-

meaning servant understood what was required of him, and left the room.

"I never saw a gentleman so changed!" he exclaimed, when he reached the house-keeper's room; "he looks as though he had seen a ghost — all haggard and scared, you know."

Stephen sat, just where the valet had left him, for some hours, before his mind had become sufficiently calm to allow him to think why he had come there, and what good end was to be answered by remaining. He had been thoroughly stunned by the awful disclosure contained in sister Mary's letter, and hitherto had been staggering about vaguely, following consistently but one idea, — that of seeking Lord Rossthorne. Have you never, in the midst of some unexpected paroxysm of mental or bodily pain, felt irresistibly impelled to fly to some person or to some place with whom and where to endure it? and until that person or that place is gained, have you not almost forgotten your agony in the anxiety to reach the goal towards which you yearn so strongly, and, it may be, without avail? I hope not; for it is only great gaping heart-wounds which create these fantasies, — wounds, the scars of which the best and happiest after-life cannot efface, and which ache at times till the crack of doom, live how long we may.

From the first, Stephen had felt assured that sister Mary knew more than she would own. Why else had she refused to refer him to any member of her family for information as to so (apparently) simple a fact as the whereabouts of an old house in which her sister had once lived? The motive for secrecy was clear now. In that house a child had been born, and confided to that sister's care. There, also, another sister had hidden the proof of that child's legitimacy; and, having acted as confidante between its mother and her unworthy husband, had, at his instigation, falsely pretended that it was dead, till, conscience-stricken, she confessed the truth. She knew full well who was the father of that child. She could guess too truly who was the murderer of Brandron. So mused Stephen Frankland.

We shudder, and our blood curdles, when we read of brave men's bodies being mangled by cannon-shot, or torn and crushed by great accidents; and the most callous of us are glad to throw a covering over the poor bleeding relics, and hide them decently from sight. Let us not pry into the soul of a man smitten so heavily as was poor Stevie. When I try to real-

ize what must have been his thoughts on this dreadful day, I thank the heavenly mercy which made him a very child before his God, as are always the best of those who are, as he was, men of men amongst their fellows in this world. Had it been otherwise, Stephen Frankland would have fallen by his own hand.

It was growing dusk before he roused himself from the stupor into which he had fallen, and leaned from the open window, wondering when Lord Rossthorne would come. His room overlooked a road, — not the principal one, — which led up to the castle from the village; and as he mused, he saw three figures strike into this from a bypath which led from a neighboring plantation. He did not notice the first nor the second, but a chill ran through his veins when he saw that the third was Inspector Lagger, and remembered what he had said when they had met at the station a few hours ago. The detective had declared that he should arrest the murderer of Brandon that night. "I have him as safe this moment as though he were lodged in Maidstone Jail!" Those were his words. What, then, could he be doing under the walls of Rossthorne Castle? Whilst Stephen yet wondered, the sound of a carriage approaching fell on his ear. Another moment, and it was close at hand. He heard Lord Rossthorne's voice calling to the coachman to stop at a side-door, which was used as an entrance in wet weather. The carriage drew up almost directly under the window, and the first person who descended from it was Sir George Tremlett!

A second glance showed Stephen that Lagger was approaching the house. He walked first of the three now, and, to his amaze, Stephen recognized in the second man, who slouched along by his side, the long-missing Jim Riley. The third, who was a much younger person than either of his companions, carried a large book under his arm.

Stephen sprang from his room to a corridor outside, which overlooked the entrance-hall, and watched. He saw his father enter with the peer. He saw the butler advance and speak to the latter. He knew well what was said, from the effect produced upon the hearers. The poor Baronet turned pale as ashes, and made as though he would return to the carriage. Lord Rossthorne was no less surprised.

"Captain Frankland!" he exclaimed, "when did he come? where is he? Here, show Sir George to his room," he contin-

ued, hurriedly, not waiting for a reply. "Where is Captain Frankland?"

"In the blue room, my Lord."

"Better not see him now, George," he said, in a low voice, to the Baronet, who stood trembling by his side. "Go to your room. Leave it to me to break the news, poor fellow. I will join you again presently."

Stephen did not hear these last words. He had returned to his room as Sir George was about to follow the servant up-stairs, and he was hardly seated again when Lord Rossthorne entered.

"Stevie," he said, holding out his hand, "this is a surprise. I wish I could say that it is a pleasant one."

Stephen rose from his seat, and flushed crimson.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, my dear boy," resumed the peer; "you are as welcome as ever, but — your father is here."

"I saw him enter with you just now."

There was that in his tone and manner which startled his host.

"Good heavens!" he said, in an agitated voice; "is it possible that you already know —"

"God help me!" sighed Stevie. "I know too much. But to what do you allude?"

Lord Rossthorne took his hand, and wrung it in silence.

"It's a bad, bad business," he said, after a long and painful pause, "but you must bear it like a man, Stevie. Remember, you are not the principal sufferer."

"Is all discovered?"

"All! But how on earth has the news reached you? I only received it by telegraph this morning."

"From whom?"

"From himself. I have been over to the Towers to-day. Of course, after what has happened, he could not stay there another hour, so I brought him here. It is safest and best for him to remain here till it has blown over a little."

"Blown over?"

"Of course. This sort of scandal makes a great noise at first, but something else turns up to distract public attention, and then it is forgotten. We must get him abroad as soon as possible, and leave the rest for the lawyers to settle."

"My Lord! my Lord!" exclaimed Stephen, "there is no such chance for him. Why, — why did you bring him here into the very jaws of death? There is not a moment to be lost. He must escape at once. They are only three now; more

may arrive at any moment. Let me go to him ;" and, wild and breathless with excitement, Stephen sprang towards the door, but the peer threw himself in the way.

"Are you mad ?"

"No, but I shall be if you stop me. I tell you I saw the detective Lagger and two others under that window just as you came in. Let me pass. I know him to be a man who will do his duty without fear and without favor. He may have arrested my father whilst we are talking here. Pray, — pray let me pass !"

"Nonsense, Stevie ; you are excited, naturally enough. You know not what you are saying, my dear fellow. Sit down."

"Lord Rossthorne," said Stephen, firmly, but through quivering lips, "you are about the last man in the world against whom I would raise my hand, but I will leave this room, — I will save my father."

The brows of the peer darkened. A threat of personal violence was more than he could stand, even from the man whom he wished to adopt as a son.

"If I had known you less well than I do, Captain Frankland," he replied, haughtily, "I might be able to account for this extraordinary conduct ; as it is, I cannot. You speak of escaping 'detectives' and 'arrest.' You are laboring under some extraordinary delusion. Nothing that has passed would justify any one in arresting your father. How on earth should it ? If you think it kind, or even reasonable, to withdraw him in his affliction from beneath the roof of his oldest friend, pray do so ; only — Stevie, what is the matter ? Are you ill ? Lean on me, my boy ; you are faint," he said, as Stephen staggered from him.

"No, no. I — I am better now," he replied, sinking into a chair. "Forgive me for what I said then ; and tell me — as quickly as — you can — please, what — what has happened at ho — at the Tanners." He spoke with his hand pressed upon his heart, and in gasps.

"I thought you knew ?"

"No. I was thinking of something else. Never mind what I said, and tell me all — all."

"You remember that person who called himself Colonel Vincent Champneys ?"

"I do. And I know now, — I have conclusive evidence that he is the scoundrel that I took him for. I sent it to my father the day before yesterday. I only got it then."

"It came too late. He has since added yet another act of villainy to his list."

"What has he done ? Go on, pray go on."

"Stevie, with all her faults, you loved your stepmother ?"

"I did, — I do ; but what of her ?"

"She has left her home, — eloped."

"Impossible !"

"It is too true."

"But not with Champneys ?" cried Stephen. "No, no, my Lord, not with him."

The old peer made no reply ; but Stevie saw, from the expression of his countenance, that his worst fears were realized.

By this time the gloaming had darkened into night, and there was no light in the room. Neither of its occupants cared to call for one, as they both felt they had that to say which is best said if accompanying emotions could be veiled. Stephen rose, and turned aside to the window, where he stood speechless, gazing sternly out into the darkness. Suddenly he returned to where Lord Rossthorne sat, and demanded, —

"We must save her. When did they go ? Where have they gone ? Is it possible to overtake — to save her ?"

Lord Rossthorne shook his head.

"She left her home on Tuesday night," he replied. "This is Friday. They have gone abroad."

"How do you know ?"

"Your poor father received a letter from that — something rose in the peer's throat, and prevented him from getting out the word, — 'that villain, this very morning, stating where he will be found —'

Stephen started up with a gesture of impatience and surprise.

" — This day month," resumed the speaker. "My dear Stevie, the scoundrel has us completely in his power. He offers to give Sir George the satisfaction of a gentleman, — mark his words ! he give the satisfaction of a gentleman ! — at St. Malo, a month hence. Do you think he will take his poor victim there ? Not he. In the mean time, he says, he will give your father any assistance in his power in taking the necessary steps to obtain a divorce."

"A divorce ?"

"The very thing he desires himself. Lady Tremlett's fortune is her own for life ; a good deal of it her own absolutely. Of course it was for her money that he has committed this act of treachery. It will be all his when he marries her. Ah,

Stevie! if her fate, and your poor father's sufferings for the last four years, could be made known to the world, what a lesson they would furnish to those who think that a wife's happiness is to be established by making her husband a dependent upon her and her children! But it is no use moralizing now," he added, with a sigh. "Will you come and see your father?" And the peer rose to leave the room.

Stephen caught him by the arm, and detained him.

"Pray do not leave me," he said. "I have something to tell you that must be said, and there is little time to say it. This last blow for a moment diverted my thoughts, and— and I feel so confused and— lost, as it were," he murmured, pressing a hand to his throbbing brow, "that I fear I can hardly express myself. You must pardon it if I speak vaguely— bear with me, even if your reason seems to revolt from what I say; for as there is a heaven above us both this night, Lord Rossthorne, I am in sad, in fearful earnest."

"My poor boy! my dear fellow! you are ill. This bad news has upset you," he said, in a fatherly, anxious tone, drawing his chair nearer to where Stevie sat. "Do not dwell upon it. Let me ring for lights, and—"

"No, no! not yet. I am not ill, and you must hear me. Before you told me this bad news, I said that my father was in deadly danger here; that the officer who has come to arrest him is at the gate, if not inside it. He must escape, and at once; for God's sake help me to contrive the means!"

"Escape from what?" exclaimed the wondering peer.

"From a felon's death," cried Stephen, in a voice of anguish. "Oh, my Lord! his life is in your hands; be generous, and help me to save it."

"Are you mad, Stevie?"

"No; but I shall be soon, if you treat me thus. Why, why will you waste these precious moments? Why will you not believe —?"

"Believe what, in Heaven's name?"

"Listen," said Stephen, calming himself with effort. "When I returned from India, I was accompanied by a gentleman named Brandron."

"I know, I know," interrupted Lord Rossthorne, somewhat impatiently; "he was killed at Westborough. You were very kind to him. I heard all about it."

"He came to Westborough," Stephen continued, not heeding the interruption,

"to meet a person whose interest it was to conceal the birth and parentage of a certain child. Brandron was determined that this child should have its rights; and to prevent the exposure he threatened,— that person murdered him."

"Vague surmise, — guess-work. Any other romantic story would fit the facts as well," observed the peer, in a low voice; "but what can this possibly have to do with your father?"

"My Lord, it was he who went with Brandron into Westborough Wood. It was he — God help him! — who was the murderer!"

"No! no! no!" thundered the peer, starting from his seat. "Ten thousand times NO, Stephen Franklaad. How can you, how dare you, bring such an accusation? Your father was not there at all."

"I saw him."

"At Westborough?"

"Within a quarter of a mile of the village."

"You surprise me. But what if he were? There were others — I mean, there must have been dozens of strangers in and about Westborough on that day, as on any other."

"Hear me out," said Stephen. "Shortly before his death, Brandron implored me to see justice done to the child, and told me that I should find proofs of her birth secreted in a certain room in Mangerton Chase. I did not know then, nor for some time afterwards, that this was the ancient name of my father's house."

"But — but of course you found that this was a delusion — a dying man's fantasy," said Lord Rossthorne, in an agitated voice. "You did not discover any papers?"

"I did. I found them all just as they had been hidden."

"When — when?"

"On the night of the 5th of September."

"Good God!"

"You know what happened on the following morning. I told my father, in leaving him forever, that I knew his secret."

"But he contradicted the — he explained —"

"Nothing. He merely implored me not to betray him."

"Impossible! Do you mean to tell me he did not deny, indignantly deny, such an accusation?"

"I made no accusation," replied Stephen, sadly. "Alas! his conscience supplied one. As I have already said, he merely implored me not to betray him."

"And yet you have done so?"

"Lord Rossthorne!"

"Oh, pardon me, Stevie. I am so agitated — so confounded by what you say, that — that — But if his secret rests with you, how can he be in danger now?"

"Unfortunately, the papers discovered at Mangerton Chase fell into — it would take too long to explain how — into the hands of the detective who is below. He was at the inquest on poor Brandron. He has been on the search for a clue to his murderer ever since, and now he has him almost within his grasp."

"But I cannot understand — I do not see — Did you read the papers found in Mangerton Chase?"

"I did — all of them, carefully."

"And yet you suspect Sir George Tremlett of being the murderer of John Brandron?"

"Too surely. Because he is the father of the child in whose cause poor Brandron died."

"He! Oh, Stephen, think — think again. You are excited now, and — and may be speaking at random. How could those papers prove that?"

"I have pondered painfully over all I am saying to you, Lord Rossthorne," replied Stephen, sadly. "You may be sure that I should not readily come to a conclusion that condemns my own parent of a fearful crime."

"I am sure of that; but to me it seems so monstrous, so wild, and — But go on."

"From the papers, I found that the child, when an infant, had been confided to the charge of one Lucy Alston. There are three Alstons, sisters, who are mixed up in this case, — Susan, Lucy, and Mary. Susan was the servant and confidante of the child's mother. It was she who hid the papers in Mangerton Chase. These prove that the child was confided to Lucy. Susan and Lucy are dead; but Mary lives, till lately a recluse in a convent at Hull, — a stern, unfeeling woman, not likely to be deceived or to deceive; and from her — oh! Lord Rossthorne, pity me, for now I come to my crowning misery — from her I learn that — But I will tell you all.

"You remember the conversation we had in your room at the Towers, respecting — respecting my — my marrying?"

"I do, well."

"You asked me if I loved Grace Lee, and I told you that I did, but there were reasons why I could never marry her."

"Had you then those suspicions of your father?"

"I had."

"Ah! I see, — go on."

"In a moment of happiness, — oh! such deep, unalloyed happiness!" continued poor Stevie, "I forgot the full misery of my position. I told her that I loved her; I asked her to be my wife. I found that she — pure angel that she is! — loved me."

"Oh, Stevie," cried the peer, in an excited but joyful tone, "this makes up for all. I am so glad. My dear, dear boy, I wish you happiness with all my heart. And you will be happy; you will be happy, Stevie, in spite of all, with such a wife."

"Oh, forbear, my Lord, forbear!" cried Stephen, to whose heart every well-meant word went like a stab. "You know not what you say. Grace Lee — who, but for God's mercy, I might have made my wife — is my father's child."

Lord Rossthorne uttered an inarticulate cry of surprise and pain.

"Now do you see," Stephen continued, "how fearfully strong a chain of evidence can be — perhaps already is — forged against my wretched father? Between the death of my dear mother and his second public marriage, he contracted a private one; and his wife having died, he sought to conceal the existence of a child, which might have proved an impediment. He got Sarah Alston to pretend that the child was dead; he deceived Brandron, who was a friend of its mother, and procured him an appointment in India. But what is the use of my going through link after link, when I tell you that he has confessed his guilt?"

"No, no; not confessed it, — impossible!"

"Not in words, but in acts. My Lord! my Lord! there are dozens and dozens of facts, all pointing to him as having killed poor Brandron. It may have been in a struggle; I think — I hope it was without premeditation; but that he struck the death-blow is — I say it to my grief — as certain as —"

"That Grace Lee is his child?"

Stephen bowed his head in sorrowful assent.

Lord Rossthorne rose, and paced two or three times up and down the dark chamber. Then he paused where Stephen sat, and, laying his hand on his shoulder, said, in a voice half choked with emotion, —

"Do you love her?"

"Love her! when —"

"Tush! I know what you mean. I

will put my question differently. Did you love her yesterday?"

"With all my soul."

"When you found that she returned your love, did you resolve to deserve it all your life? The first love of a girl like Grace Lee is a holy, solemn trust for a man to receive, Stephen Frankland."

"It is indeed."

"There are few of us who can look back into our lives and say that we deserve it."

"Very few, — not I, for one."

"Honest as ever. Did you resolve to give her all your heart in return, and to keep it always hers? Did you resolve to make her happiness the first object of your life, to shield her from all sorrow, — in a word, to do your utmost duty as a Christian gentleman towards her?"

"I did, I did, my Lord;" and the tears which he could not restrain poured down his worn cheeks

"But this was yesterday!" There was a strange gleam in Lord Rossthorne's eyes as he spoke, and the tone of his voice made it almost seem as though he were mocking Stephen's grief. He took one other rapid turn up and down the room, and was just on the point of speaking again, when a violent altercation was heard in the corridor outside; and before he could reach the door to see what was the matter, it was violently thrown open, and a glare of light poured into the room, and, for the moment, blinded its occupants.

When their eyes became accustomed to it, they saw Mr. Lagger in the act of locking the door on the inside. He had put down his lamp on the table.

"You know what business has brought me here, Captain," he said, in a firm but respectful voice. "I depended upon the county police; but, as usual, they have made fools of themselves and me. I'm not a-going, though, to let night come on without doing what I've got to do. I'm sorry for you, Captain, very sorry; but dooty's dooty, and must be done; so I call on you in the Queen's name to aid and assist me."

"And I decline to do so," said Stephen, confronting him.

"Captain, you don't know the law. If you assist in the escape of a murderer, you make yourself an accessory after the fact to the murder, and so I tell you."

"No matter, I refuse. Man, how can you call upon me, — me, — to assist in the apprehension of my — my — I refuse; there!"

"Then I shall do my dooty single-handed," said Lagger, drawing a revolver from his pocket; "and take care what you are about. It's best to take these things quietly. People don't get no sort of good by resisting. Ha! at last!" he said, as the sound of horses' hoofs rang in the road below. "That's the patrol; and pretty fellows they are to put on the outside of a horse! Why, I'd have come in less time on my hands and knees. Now," he added, advancing to Lord Rossthorne, and laying his hand on his shoulder, "you see that resistance is useless. *You are my prisoner.*"

"Lagger," cried Stephen, in amaze, "you are wrong; that is not my — That is Lord Rossthorne."

"I know it; and he is my prisoner."

"Stand off, fellow!" exclaimed the peer; "how dare you lay your hand on me?"

"By virtue of a warrant issued yesterday by Mr. Turner and Sir Joseph Sykes, justices of the county of Kent."

"And what, in the name of fortune, do they charge against me?" asked the peer, smiling in spite of his annoyance at this scene.

"You are charged with the wilful murder of John Everett Brandron, in Westborough Wood, on the twenty-ninth of July last. Now you're not obliged to make any reply, but I caution you that if you do say anything, I shall take it down, and it may be used in evidence against you."

Before the peer and Stephen could recover from the astonishment caused by these words of the detective, the tramp of men was heard in the passage, Lagger threw open the door, and half a dozen armed police marched into the room, followed by Sir George Frankland.



CHAPTER XXXII.

DISENTANGLEMENT.

"WHAT on earth is the meaning of this?" cried the Baronet. "What are these men doing here?"

"They have arrested me for murder," replied Lord Rossthorne, in a hollow voice. He was deadly pale, almost livid, and huge drops of perspiration stood on his brow.

"Murder? Absurd! Whose murderer?"

"I am charged with having killed John Brandron, at Westborough, on the twenty-ninth of July last."

"There must be some horrible mistake," said the Baronet, getting very pale in his turn, and trembling violently as he spoke. "Why, he was not there at all."

"How do you know?" demanded Lagger, turning sharp round upon him.

"Because I was there myself," replied Sir George, "on the very day."

"Ah!" observed the detective, in his reflective manner, "you was the *other*. I know now. You was the one as went to old Mrs. Riley's cottage, and wanted to know"—

"Hush-h!"

"Well, *that* ain't no business of mine. You're sure you did not see his Lordship there — about Westborough, I mean — that day?"

"No. I could take my oath he was not there that day."

"There! you hear?" said Stephen. "This is some folly, or worse, — a conspiracy to extort money."

Lagger cast a reproachful glance at the speaker.

"Whatever it is," he said, firmly, "it's no manner of use talking to me about it here. You must talk to Mr. Turner and Sir Joseph Sykes, in Poundbridge Town Hall, where I'm bound to take his Lordship as speedily as possible."

"The man is quite right, George," said the peer; "his warrant is regular, and must be obeyed. — Do you propose [this to Lagger] taking me hence to-night?"

"Why, if so be as certain persons had come when they *ought* to have come," replied the detective, scraping his chin with his fist, and eying the county police in a not over-flattering manner, "we could have caught the mail-train, got safe to London, and gone on the first thing in the mornin'; but as they've bin to sleep, and let the time slip by, it's impossible. You can stop here to-night, my Lord, only you'll excuse my stopping outside your door, and allow these officers to remain in the house."

"Certainly. The inconvenience will only be a temporary one."

"Of course. These sort of things always are," replied Lagger, dryly.

"For the present," continued the peer, "I suppose I may be left in peace with these gentlemen [indicating Stevie and his father]; I have much to say to them."

"Say what you please," replied Lagger; "only remember you are not obliged to say *anything*, and —"

"I know; I know. Leave us now. You need not look at the window; it is at least forty feet from the ground, and I am not a squirrel."

The officers then withdrew, and for some moments there was a painful silence. It was broken at last by Lord Rossthorne, who said,—

"Sir George Tremlett, will you answer me one or two questions as a man of honor in the presence of your son, before I ask you to hear what I have got to say in answer to this incredible charge?"

"That I will."

"What do you know about the murder of John Brandron?"

"As little as from the bottom of my heart I believe you do."

"Thanks, old friend!" said the peer, warmly pressing his hand, — "thanks! You have said that you were at Westborough on that fatal day. Did you go there to see him?"

"No."

"Did you see him when you were there?"

"As I never knew him, I cannot say whether I did or not."

"Were you aware that certain papers bearing upon business of his were hidden in your house, — I mean Mangerton Chase that was?"

"Not I! Who says they were?"

"One more, and I have done," continued Lord Rossthorne, not heeding the question. "Think well now before you answer. Have you ever, in joke or earnest, or speaking ambiguously, given any one to understand, or said what might lead any one to suppose, that you had act or part in Brandron's death?"

"My God! no. How could I? Does any one presume to think that I —"

Stephen sprang forward with glittering eyes, and half choking with the emotion which he had with difficulty suppressed during the above colloquy, but Lord Rossthorne spoke, —

"Hush-h! — hush, my boy!" he whispered in his ear; "enough has been said, hush!"

"No, not enough yet!" replied honest Stevie. I have done my father a bitter wrong, and will atone for it. Father, can you forgive me? Since the night of the third of September I have looked upon you as Brandron's murderer!"

"In Heaven's name, why?" demanded the Baronet, aghast.

Then his son made a clean breast of it, and told him all, — all that we know so well had been tormenting him, from his first suspicions to what he had considered the crowning proofs of his father's guilt, namely, his entreaty not to be betrayed when he (Stevie) had said he knew why he (his father) had gone to Westborough, and the statement of Mary Alston respecting Grace. This told, he ended with a passionate and almost childish appeal, — he, the strong, battle-bronzed hero, — for that forgiveness which the poor Baronet was only too ready to accord.

"The secret of my journey to Westborough, which I fancied you had penetrated when I spoke those unlucky words," he said, "needs no longer be concealed. I have truly loved but one woman all my life, Stevie, and that woman was your dear mother. But I was a vain fool in my younger days, fond of conquest and intrigue; and a few years after your birth I got entangled in a disreputable connection with a person long since dead, the result of which was the birth of a child, — a girl, whom I placed under the care of a woman who had been a servant of my friend Lord Penruthyn, who once rented Mangerton Chase. Her name was Riley."

"Then she was Mrs. Riley, of Westborough?"

"She was. For years we had no communication beyond my sending her the quarterly payment which I was able to make for the support of the child. At last I received a poor ill-written letter from her, saying that she was dying, and calling upon me to come and take away the child, then grown into a young woman, but, poor creature, an idiot from her birth."

Oh, how Stephen's heart leaped!

"I went," continued Sir George, "but arrived too late. The poor woman was dead; and her son, for some reason which I cannot fathom, had removed the child — to this moment I know not whither. I wish to Heaven I did."

"May I ask you one question?" said Stevie.

"Twenty, if you like."

"Under what name did the mother of this child know you?"

"Under my own. That was the reason why I was so anxious to conceal the existence of the child, when I was in the power of Mr. Tremlett, the guardian of the lady who was once my own wife. Lord Rossthorne has told you of this last blow, Stevie."

"He has."

"Well, it is all over now," said the poor Baronet, with a sigh; "and there is no reason why the truth should not be known."

"In our own trouble we must not forget to sympathize in the happiness of others," said Lord Rossthorne. "Stevie, you have a confession to make to your father. Speak out, man. Do you not see that this error, or lie, of Mary Alston's is blown to the winds, and that the Grace Lee of yesterday may be the Grace of many a happy year to come? Why do you sit thus aghast? Must I speak for you?"

Stephen tried to explain, but was too agitated to make himself understood. Poor fellow! he had borne up bravely against his misfortunes; but the delight of finding his father innocent of that fearful crime, and of knowing that Grace might yet be his own, was too much for him, and he fairly gave way. So Lord Rossthorne continued the story, and made clear to Sir George what the reader already knows. Then taking up what remained of the *Tangled Skein*, he unravelled it at a touch.

"The accusation made against me just now," he said, "necessitates the disclosure of a secret which I thought — which I hoped — would descend with me into the grave. A secret," he added, bitterly, "which will be public property before tomorrow night, bawled out, I dare say, at the corner of every street, and hawked in every penny newspaper. I am charged with the murder of John Brandron. No, do not interrupt me, please. Let me tell my story in my own way, and hear me patiently. I do not know what evidence may be brought against me upon this charge, but what I am about to tell you is the truth, the plain, cruel truth — so help me God!"

"When your father first knew me, Stevie, I was a proud and happy man. I do not know that I could have wished for anything beyond that which I enjoyed. I was rich — I had good health and a happy home. I was ambitious; and such was the state of political parties then, that I had only to hold out my hand for the highest offices in the State to fall into my grasp. I was proud of my name and ancient family; and saw around me five stalwart sons, destined, as I hoped, to perpetuate the one and add fresh lustre to the other. What more could a man desire? I possessed everything in plenty that man could ask; and how did I use all these good gifts and blessings? As a trust confided to me by the *Giver of all?* No! I made

them into a throne which I usurped over my less fortunate fellow-men; and, in the plenitude of my power and self-conceit, scorned them as though they belonged to a different race—as though they were beasts of burden, slaves to work my bidding, or foils, to prove, by their misery and disgrace, how great and good a man was I. Pride was my besetting sin—pride of race; and its punishment has been that I am now alone in the world, the last of my name. In those days I lived some part of the year in London; and what was it to me that thousands of miserable wretches were herded together like swine within a few hundred yards of the fashionable square in which my mansion stood? They were out of sight. Their nakedness and squalor did not offend the eye. They were generally quiet in their wretchedness. If they broke our law and disturbed our tranquillity, care enough was taken to punish them, and provide against a repetition of the annoyance; but not a finger was lifted by me, and those like me, to teach them obedience to the natural laws of God, by which His universe is governed. Ignorance, and filth, and crime—those Furies more terrible than any that heathen imagination has conceived—ran riot amongst them, and their handiwork was death—a sudden, terrible, all but incurable fever. The poor creatures, by whose neglect of common decency it was engendered, seldom ventured into the wide, handsome streets where we, who should have taught them better, lived our lives of ease and comfort. If they ventured to loiter there, the police drove them back to their pestilential, teeming courts and alleys. But whose was the power to keep the deadly fever they had produced within their bounds? Who could prevent it from flying where an outraged Providence directed it? It found my dear wife surrounded by every luxury that love could devise, and struck her down. It found my eldest son,—my heir, revelling in the strength and spirits of approaching manhood, and in two hours killed him. It passed over his baby-brother, smiling in his cradle, and he never smiled again. We fled from the plague-stricken place; but it was no use. The destroyer was in the midst of us,—and not only of us, but of our neighbors. The 3d of June is the anniversary of my birthday. On the 3d of June, 1825, a true, loving wife, and five happy, handsome children, wished me joy. On the 12th of the same month I was a heart-broken widower, watching beside what

they told me must be the death-bed of the only little one that was left me. All the rest had perished. By God's mercy she was saved."

"That was poor Mary," said Sir George, seeing that the narrator paused.

"It was. Oh, how I loved that child! She was the very light of my eyes; and as she developed into a lovely womanhood, the fear that she might be won away to leave me preyed upon me day and night, and made me suspicious and morose, even to her. It is all vastly well to philosophize, and say that parents must make up their minds that their children will sooner or later marry and leave them, even as they have done their parents in their turn before. Mothers, I believe, feel a sort of pride that their daughters should become wives and mothers in due course of time and nature; but (if I may judge by my own feelings) it is vastly different with a father. The idea that my beautiful, fragile Mary could ever leave me for love of another; that I—I, her father,—who had hardly ever let her out of my sight for fifteen lonely years, should give her over to the arms of a stranger, was galling; nay, more than that, it was *horrible*.

"I have no doubt that my great sorrow had made me morbid," Lord Rossthorne resumed, after a pause, and in a more composed tone, "but so it was. I need not tell you that I had long given up all ambitious views. I had no heart for anything, and lived here in close retirement with Mary till she was in her eighteenth year. Then I was over-persuaded by my wife's sister,—you remember her, George? she married Algernon Chappel, who afterwards became Lord Manxover,—a good-hearted but shallow woman of the world. By her Mary was presented at Court and introduced into society, I accompanying her wherever she went. Will you believe me, Stevie, when I tell you that when I saw her the centre of attraction (as she was at every ball we attended), I felt more than once an almost irresistible impulse to dash into the circle of young fellows who were clamoring to engage her for the dances, scatter them right and left, and carry her off to this grim old castle once more, away from them all!"

"A great friend of Mrs. Chappel's was one George Howell, a lieutenant in a line regiment, on leave from Canada. Of all the young men by whom Mary was surrounded, I was least jealous, least apprehensive of him. He never obtruded himself upon her as others did; besides, though by birth and profession a gentle-

man, he was so very far below her, that I considered it impossible that she could ever give him a thought as a lover — she whose beauty, birth, and wealth entitled her to the highest coronet that our peerage could offer. Ah, what a blind fool I was! I think he must have fascinated her with his sad, stedfast eyes, and low, soft voice; but I discovered the spell too late to save her: she loved him!

Many and many a time have I cursed myself for the folly of the course I pursued on this discovery. What must I do in my wisdom but insult the man she loved, in her presence, by way of winning back her heart from him to me; by constantly telling her that she should marry him only over my dead body, by way of seeking to make her forget him; be hard and cold to her, by way of making her contented with her lot with me; accuse, mistrust, and — as a final piece of madness, — imprison her in her rooms, by way of obtaining her confidence, and teaching her not to deceive me! She did deceive me. She had a clandestine correspondence and stolen interviews with Howell. But it was I who drove her into deceit. Finally, I sent her away into the country to live with her aunt, who — I must do her justice — heartily opposed Howell's pretensions. Chappel's country residence was then near his father's estate, in a wild, lovely district on the borders of Derbyshire, on the Lancashire side, not far from Buxton. *There*, I thought, she will be safe, particularly as I had used some influence I possessed at the Horse Guards to get the remainder of Howell's leave cancelled, and to have him ordered to join the dépôt of his regiment in the Channel Islands.

"I have said that I had no fears on this score till it was too late. There was one about me who saw clearer than I did, loving as I was, — jealous and fearsome of this very danger. This was John Everett Brandron, my foster-brother."

At these words a cold shudder ran through Stephen Frankland, for they brought upon him the remembrance of what Brandron had said in his delirium; how he had all but denounced this foster-brother as his murderer, — as the man who had done the wrong, to demand reparation for which he had come from India.

"This Brandron had been for many years my secretary, and a sort of general manager of my estates and agent in my affairs. He was of a stern, unprepossessing character, but a man of the strictest

honor, and in heart and soul devoted to me and mine. He had known my Mary from her infancy, and, strange as it may appear, loved her, — he, a man older than myself! — with a patient, silent, and, of course, hopeless affection. I was blind to this also till the end came. *He* saw what was passing, and told me of it. I was indignant at the bare suggestion, and, in return for his anxious warning, gave him the first harsh words he had ever received from my lips.

"Well, time passed by, and Mary returned here, much changed, as I thought, and looking worn and ill. She would sit silent for hours, and I often saw tears stealing down her cheeks. Woe is me! They were of my causing, and they washed away the roses from her bonny face.

"One dreadful day, the memory of which haunts me still, she fled; and so well were her measures taken, that nearly a month passed before I could obtain a clue to where she had gone. At last I received information which hurried me, George, to your house in Derbyshire, then, as you know, under lease to the Penruthyans; and there, attended only by her maid, Sarah Alston, I found her on the very eve of giving birth to a child!

"Penruthy, I believe, was more sinned against than sinning; but you may remember, Tremlett, what sort of reputation his brothers enjoyed in those days. Not a woman, — married or single, gentle or simple, — was safe from them. Judge, then, what were my emotions when I found my loved child in such a condition and in such a house! The truth, bad enough in itself, was a blessed relief; and the truth was, that during her visit to Derbyshire my daughter had been privately married to George Howell."

"Who basely deserted her in her hour of sorrow!" burst out Stephen, in a tone of indignation.

"No, my boy," replied the peer, sadly; "who was drowned at sea whilst hurrying to console her. When the news came to him that she could no longer conceal her secret from me, he left Guernsey — where he was stationed — in an open boat, and tried to make Weymouth. Poor fellow! A sudden squall arose, the boat foundered, and he was lost in sight of the lights of the town. This, however, was not discovered till long after poor Mary's death, and up to this moment is known only by me. Let me pass quickly over what followed the birth of the child. My darling faded gradually away; and when she was gone,

I committed the crime — the folly — which has embittered my years. I was so enraged against Howell, that I resolved never to acknowledge his child. I hushed up my daughter's flight as well as I could, pretending — whilst moving heaven and earth, secretly, to find her — that we had had a quarrel; that I was in the wrong; that she had merely returned to her aunt; had written, asking me for forgiveness; and that I had consented to her remaining. I implored Lady Manxover to bear me out in this, and she did. I had my poor darling removed privately to her house, and there she died. Only three persons shared my secret, — Lady Manxover, Sarah Alston, and Brandron. I won the first two over to my scheme, but stern John Brandron was obdurate. He swore that Mary's child should be acknowledged, and urged her rights in spite of me and my pride; and it was only by bribing Sarah and Lucy Alston to declare that the child had died (Lucy not knowing whose child it was), that he reluctantly agreed not to disclose the marriage. From this moment our connection ceased. I obtained him an appointment in India, and we parted."

"I find from his papers," said Stevie, "that he received a sum of twelve hundred pounds shortly before he left England. What was that for?"

"That was his savings. I had invested them for him, and there was some difficulty about realizing the securities; so that the money could not be obtained till just a day or two before he sailed."

"It was not a bribe, then?"

"A bribe! No," replied Lord Rossthorne; "the Bank of England could not bribe John Brandron to be a party to a lie, as I, — a peer of the realm, — was driven by my cursed pride to be."

"Was the Lucy Alston whom you have mentioned ever in the service of the Penruthyns?" asked Sir George Tremlett.

"She was."

"How very strange!" ejaculated Sir George. "This Lucy Alston was the mother of my poor afflicted child. She gave it birth about the time when poor Mrs. Howell must have died."

"She did; and both children remained with her till her death," resumed Lord Rossthorne, "when they were taken charge of by her sister Susan (or Sarah, as she was sometimes called, because there was another servant called Susan in my house), until I removed my grandchild."

"Is he still living?" asked Stephen, unable to control his curiosity.

"It was a girl, Stevie — a poor helpless girl — that I cast adrift in the world without a protector. Many a time I repented of the act. Do me the justice to remember that I was half mad when I committed it. But it could not be recalled. My heart yearned towards her as she grew into womanhood and became the very image of her mother. She lives still, Stevie, and I have never lost sight of her. Can you realize how I must love and honor those who have loved and honored my child in spite of the dark stain that I have cast upon her birth? Will you wonder at my wishing to make you my adopted son, when I tell you that the child of my own darling is no other than your affianced bride, Grace Lee?"

"Grace Lee!" exclaimed Sir George, in amaze.

"Henceforward Grace Howell till I die, then Lady Rossthorne, a peeress of Great Britain in her own right. Poor Percy Coryton has lost his chance of a seat in the House of Lords."

"By Jove, Stevie!" cried his father, "think of that."

"I shall love her none the better for it," he answered, with a sigh; "but pray don't mind me; I am so dazed with all that I have heard. Go on, pray go on, Lord Rossthorne, about Brandron."

"You are ashamed to love the daughter of a murderer, I see."

"Nothing could make me ashamed to love Grace Lee," replied Stephen, stoutly; "but this must be cleared up. Was it you who walked with John Brandron into Westborough Wood on the afternoon of the 29th July, 1858?"

"It was."

Sir George fell back aghast; and Stephen resumed, "I have been so deceived by circumstantial evidence that I will believe no more of it. This much I know from Brandron himself, — Susan Alston wrote to him in India, confessing that the child — your daughter's child, as you own — was living. He appointed a meeting with you to compel justice to be done it; and up to the hour of his death he believed that yours was the hand that struck him down."

"Good heavens, Stevie!" cried the peer, amazed by what he heard; "you must mistake. It could not be. Did he mention my name at all? No, he could not, or you?"

"He did not mention your name, though repeatedly urged to do so. I tell you, my

Lord, that though he refused to denounce you, he said things which satisfy me, beyond the possibility of doubt, that he considered you his murderer."

"Then why did he not denounce me?"

"For the sake of your daughter, whom he loved, and of her child, he desired that no shame should fall upon you if you performed the act of justice which he demanded."

"Did he say so?" asked Lord Rossthorne, in a choking voice.

"He did."

"Stevie, had he his senses when he said this?"

"Once I thought that he had not,—that what he said was merely the ravings of delirium; but everything he told me has turned out so true that I can think so no longer."

"True even to the fact of my being his murderer?" asked the peer.

Stephen made no reply.

"Stephen Frankland, I have committed many sins; some—the gravest, perhaps, in man's eyes—I have confessed to you this day; but, as I hope for forgiveness of all when I stand before the judgment-seat of God, I am not guilty of Brandron's death! I left him alive and well that day in Westborough Wood, as I hope for salvation!"

Stephen looked him full in the face as he spoke those solemn words. There was no falter in his speech, not a quiver in his countenance. Stevie believed him, and told him so, wringing his hand with emotion.

"I had long wished to do what he required," Lord Rossthorne resumed, "but lacked courage to take the first step. Moreover, there had been great difficulty in my way, and to my sorrow it remains. I had destroyed as far as I could—I need not here tell you how—the evidences of my child's marriage. Brandron, however, told me where I should find others, and I left him, fully resolved to do all that he could ask. I sought for those proofs where he directed, but they were not to be found."

"Where—where was it that he told you to seek?" demanded Stephen, eagerly.

"Strangely enough, in an old room, the door of which had long been bricked up, at Tremlett Towers."

"The room at the end of the tapestryed corridor?"

"That was it."

"And you—you searched there? How? When?"

"During my late visit. You must forgive me, Sir George. I knew I could give you no valid excuse short of the truth for opening that room; so whilst you all thought I was laid up with a fit of the gout, I broke through the brickwork under the tapestry, working at night, and in the middle of the day when every one was out, and at last made a hole sufficiently large to thrust my body through into the room. I found the place indicated by Brandron as the depository of the proofs, but they were not there. I am afraid that Susan Alston was only too faithful to the evil trust I reposed in her, and that she destroyed them."

"She did not!"

"Stevie! How can *you* know?"

"Because they are in my possession." Then Stevie told how he had anticipated the peer, had found the papers, how Lagger had surprised him at their perusal, and how he had rushed to the conclusion that it was his father who was working outside the door on that eventful night. He also stated, as well as he could from memory, the contents of those papers, and the letters which had been found in Brandron's possession at Westborough.

"It is plain now why this charge has been brought against me," said the peer, gloomily. "That letter of Susan Alston's conveys a dreadful suspicion against the person of whom she speaks, and they have identified that person with me, because I am, or was, interested in concealing the parentage of the child, and thus they have concluded that I had a motive in silencing poor Brandron."

"I agree with you that the papers contain an inference that the person who was interested in concealing the birth of the child was the person who murdered Brandron," said Sir George Tremlett, "but they must go a step farther before they can implicate you. They must show either that you are the man who met him at Westborough, or prove poor Mary's marriage, and identify you as her father. Now, did any one see you with Brandron that day?"

"Only some boys; and they could not describe me. They would not know me again. In fact, they mistook that detective who is here now, for me, at the inquest."

"I think I know what has led to your arrest," said Stephen. "At first the detective suspected the father of the child mentioned in Alston's letter; and the marriage certificate found by me being destroyed by rats, on the part where the

description of the father — his rank, his parents' names, and so on — is entered, he went to compare it with the original, for the purpose of supplying these details."

"But how did he know where the original was to be found?" asked Sir George.

"Oh, that was stated plainly enough on the certificate. He will examine the registry books of Craigsleigh, and there he will find that the bride was the daughter of Lord Rossthorne and —"

"Do I understand you that the description of the bride's parents is also obliterated from the certificate?" asked the peer, in an eager, excited tone.

"Yes, entirely."

"Then they have no case against me," said Lord Rossthorne, decisively. "Oh, Stevie, I wish they had, as far as this goes, for I am innocent; but the want of this part of the certificate renders it impossible that my dear grandchild's rights can ever be legally established."

"How so, when there is the register?"

"The page in the register which contains the entry of her mother's marriage has been destroyed."

"Then," said Stevie, smiling, "I shall not marry a peeress. It is getting late now, and I have too long delayed to do what I ought to have done an hour ago, only I have been too excited and confused to think of it. Is there an electric telegraph, my Lord, at your station?"

"I am sorry to say there is not. It is only a loop line."

"Which is the nearest station where there is one?"

"B——, but it is twelve miles off."

"Will you lend me a horse to carry me there, and not mind my riding him hard?"

"With all my heart! but what do you want to do?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"Humph! I think I can. Poor child! poor child! This must have been a sharp, though, thank God, a short trial for her. Don't spare my horses, Stevie. I would say *send*, but I know your heart says *go*."

Stephen raced to B——, and set the lightning in motion. CLICK! click! went a needle at Poundbridge station — one message. CLICK! click! again — another, — both from B——. A sleepy flyman woke up and sent to harness his horses. He was to have five pounds — so said second telegraphic message — if he delivered the first at Kerndon Rectory in an hour.

It was long past midnight when Stephen returned from B——. He was quietly making his way up to his bedroom when

one of the county police met him in the passage, and thrust a slip of paper into his hand.

It was a summons, requiring him to appear at the Town Hall, Poundbridge, on the following day, as a witness against Charles, Baron Rossthorne, on a charge of wilful murder; and to produce all papers in his custody or control which he had obtained from John Everett Brandron, deceased or otherwise, by reason of information by him given.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.

THE news that the perpetrator of the Westborough murder had been discovered ran like wildfire through that village and Poundbridge, and people came trooping in from all directions, till the Town Hall was crammed to suffocation; and a goodly mob collected in and about the railway-station to see the prisoner taken out of his carriage, and groan at him according to custom. The latter assemblage, however, was disappointed. Up came the train, and out bunched its passengers, but no handcuffed ruffian — no police — appeared. Three gentlemen were helped out of a first-class carriage by a respectably dressed man, who might have been their servant, so attentive was he to them, particularly to the one with the gray hair. A fly was engaged, and the eldest two of these passengers, accompanied by the respectably dressed man, were driven off to the town. The third, who remained behind on the platform, was Stephen Frankland; and the cause of his thus delaying was, that Cuthbert Lindsay was there to meet him, in accordance with a request contained in the telegraphic message of the night before.

"No, Sir," said the little man, firmly, and drawing back, as Stevie pressed forward to shake him by the hand. "There is a good deal to be explained before you and I shake hands again, Captain Frankland."

"Have you not received my telegram, then?" he demanded.

"I have, but it tells me nothing. When a gentleman proposes for a young lady, and rushes out of the house the next morning, telling her not to think of him again, it requires something more than a vague telegram, saying that he has been deceived as to something which he does not condescend

to mention, to set him right with her friends," said Lindsay, dryly.

"True, Cuddy, and I am here to answer everything. Now come more this way, where we shall be out of hearing. Read that;" and he placed Sister Mary's letter in his friend's hand. "That was flung through my window the night before last. Can you wonder now that I fled the house?" Cuddy's stern demeanor fell from him like a mask.

"Oh, my poor fellow! is it true?" he exclaimed.

"Thank God! no, Cuddy. But I had awfully strong reasons to believe that it was, as I think you will admit, when I tell you what must now be told."

"What an infamous wretch the woman must be!"

"I am almost sure that she, too, has been deceived, and acted conscientiously. But, oh, Cuddy, do let me explain all afterwards, and tell me now, how is she—how is Grace?"

"Grace Lee's a thorough brick!" replied Cuddy, with fervor. "At first we were in an awful fright about her. Upon my word, Stevie, we thought that she had lost her reason."

"My poor darling! my poor, poor darling! Was her grief so wild?"

"No, that was the worst of it! If she had cried, and gone into hysterics, and all that, one would not have minded so much; but she was so awfully calm. Half the day she remained in a sort of trance; and about sunset she heaved a deep sigh, pressed Gerty's hand, and whispered, 'It was like a happy dream, dear—too happy to last. Don't think badly of him, Gerty, for my sake;' and then she dressed and came down, and tried to go about as usual, but we could see that her heart was breaking."

"We are wasting time here!" cried Stephen, petulantly. "Come away, Cuddy. Let me go to her at once. I will explain all as we drive along." And he kept his word.

"I got into an awful row with Gerty," said Cuthbert, when Stevie had concluded, "for sticking up for you. Lord, what a lot of lies I told for your sake, old boy! Hang it! I knew you were not the man to do such a thing for nothing, though I was cross with you to your face at the station."

"You have not shaken hands with me yet. No, no!" Stephen cried, as Cuddy began to pull up the ponies in order to do so. "Don't stop! I'll take the will for the deed. Pitch into those fat brutes, and make them go along. You don't half drive, Cuddy!"

"Don't you be impatient! But, as I was

going to say, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. After having fought the whole house on your account, and being pitched into right and left, you may imagine how cocky I was when your telegram came. They had gone to bed; but I had them all up, after having first of all sent little Maud privately to tell Grace. I assembled them in the dining-room, and talked to them like a father about the folly of jumping to conclusions, for about a quarter of an hour, before I let them know what news was in the telegram; and I would have kept them longer in suspense, if that great blackguard Jackson had not taken it away from me by force. The upshot was that Gerty relented, said she was sorry for having rowed me, &c., &c. So then I went in and won."

"What, proposed for her?"

"Yes. Tremendously plucky thing for a little fellow like me to do, wasn't it now?"

"And have you been accepted?"

"Well, at first I was, unconditionally; and I became the happiest little chap alive; but this morning she said all depended upon your making it right with Grace."

"Then consider yourself again the happiest little fellow in the world, as you are the best," said Stephen. "Cuddy, how can I show you my gratitude?"

"By not thanking me;—but I have not told you all. Scarcely had it got wind that Gerty and I had— you know what, when that ruffian Gigas comes sidling into my room, looking like a great sheep; and, after a deal of stammering, lets it out that he and little Maud had been engaged for the last three days, and that they had not pluck enough between them to tell anybody. Of course, I flung a boot at his head, and afterwards dragged him into the presence of the injured 'parent.'"

"And what did the injured 'parent' do?"

"Well, he had little Maud into his study, and she said she liked the creature, though how— No, chaffing apart, he's a right down good fellow, is old Gigas, and the brute will have at least a couple of thousand a year: so they are to be married in the spring."

"And you?"

"Why, it never rains but it pours," replied Cuddy. "I have not got rich uncles and estates in Lincolnshire, you know; and dear Gerty's face is her fortune. Will you believe it, that this very morning comes a letter, with a big official seal, containing such a jolly letter from old Pam to Mr. Treherne (they were at college together), offering him the vacant Crown living of

Questerthorpe, worth £1,200 a year? There was a slice of luck!"

"It was, indeed!"

"Nothing remains, therefore, but for you to make it all right with Grace, and then we shall all be as jolly as sandboys."

"I am sorry to say that there is more than that to be done, my dear old boy," said Stevie, — at least, as far as Grace and I are concerned. I have told you whose child she is *not*. It will soon be acknowledged whose child she is."

"Indeed!"

"She is the granddaughter of Lord Rossthorne; and, incredible as it may appear, he is on his trial at this moment for the murder of John Brandron."

"Good heavens! And is he guilty?"

"I believe not with all my heart; but there is an awfully strong case of suspicion against him. I am summoned as a witness, but they won't catch me till I have seen Grace; beside, the papers that they require are in my luggage at the Rectory. But what are you about? — what on earth are you doing now?"

Well might he ask; for having arrived at the top of a hill, Cuddy pulled up the ponies, and taking a fishing-rod from under the seat of the phaeton, began to put it together. This done, he got out, took off his coat, and commenced climbing up a big tree there was on the road-side.

"Never you mind, old man!" he said, swinging himself up into the fork, and dragging the fishing-rod after him; "you hold those spirited animals, and see what you shall see." Then the climber, having reached the topmost branches, tied a white handkerchief at the end of the rod, stuck it up high above the now thin and withering foliage, and there left it.

"They can see that signal from the Rectory windows," he said, as he reseated himself in the carriage, "and they know now that the devil is not so black as he is painted — the present application of which pleasant proverb is, that Stephen Frankland has explained himself to the satisfaction of Cuthbert Lindsay, who promised, on his honor, to judge him impartially; and that he is being brought back in triumph to Kernen, home, and beauty. Hurrah! Come up, you little rascals! Do you think I haven't got a point to my whip?" And the ponies caught it.

So when they arrived at the Rectory, no stern inquiry stood between Stephen and the happiness of once more clasping Grace to his heart. By degrees he told her the origin and progress of his suspicions against his father, and cleared up every doubtful

point in his past conduct. I am sorry to add that, thus engaged, he forgot all about his subpœna and Poundbridge Town Hall, until Sir George appeared, to report that the prisoner had been remanded for two days; not, however, on account of Stevie's absence, but because another witness, whose evidence was required to complete the case, had not yet arrived; and also to give Lord Rossthorne an opportunity of obtaining legal assistance.

"Which," said the Baronet, "he stands sorely in need of, Stevie; for they have produced a man who swears that he saw poor Rossthorne coming out of the wood about three quarters of an hour after the boys; Little Tod and the rest say that they saw Brandron enter it with the stranger. They, too, identify our friend; but after their mistake at the inquest, that won't go for much."

"Who have you sent for?"

"Well, we've telegraphed for Coleman, with instructions to bring down some one from London whom he can trust."

"And where is he now — Lord Rossthorne, I mean?"

"They have let him remain at the hotel in custody of the police. The magistrates are behaving very well — very well indeed. Have you told her yet?" he added in a whisper, indicating Grace Lee.

"No; but it must be done to-night," Stevie replied, with a sigh. "After all, the case is only one of suspicion. They *cannot* prove that he killed Brandron."

"My dear boy, many a man has been hung on circumstantial evidence less cogent than what can be brought against Rossthorne — if they get all that we know of. They will make you divulge all that Brandron said on his death-bed; and if they can only connect the accused with that secret marriage, and the concealment of the child, so as to show a motive, I do not know what can save him."

"But he is innocent. He will swear it."

"Prisoners are not allowed to defend themselves on oath. No one was present in the wood but themselves during their interview. There *can* be no direct evidence, as far as I can see. The case will have to be judged by circumstances, and all the circumstances are against us. If they can only prove *motive*, we are done for."

Mr. Treherne was very anxious that Sir George should take up his quarters at the Rectory, but he declined.

"Thank you very much," he said, "but I must stay with my friend. I only came over to tell Stevie what had happened. I

guessed where I should find him. Good-by. Nay, Grace, I have a right to one kiss as Stevie's father. God bless you, my dear child! Good-by;" and he hurried away to his fly, and drove back to Poundbridge.

That night Stephen took Grace aside, and told her all.

"Oh, Stevie!" she said, reproachfully, "why did you not let me know this before? What will he think of me for not having hastened to his side to sustain him under this heavy accusation? Promise that you will take me to-morrow the first thing, Steevie; promise now."

"I will, my darling; but remember that his safety depends upon those who prosecute him not discovering that you are Mary Howell's child."

"My poor mother! But, Stevie, why is that? What can it matter, when he is innocent?"

"Dearie, those who understand these things better than I do, say that if it can be proved that your grandfather is actually the person that poor Brandron came to meet, a *motive* for the murder will be attached to him."

"But you say that they were seen together at Westborough!"

"Yes; and it will appear from the papers that I shall be obliged to produce, that *some one* had a motive for silencing the murdered man. They have to prove that Lord Rossthorne is that *some one*, and they have not done that yet. The mere fact of their meeting is comparatively an insignificant one."

"And is it possible that life and death depend upon such subtleties as this?" demanded Grace.

"Indeed, it would seem so."

"Stevie!"

"Darling mine."

"You will not misjudge me if I tell you what is passing in my mind?"

"I am certain nothing passes there but what is good and unselfish."

"Well, then, I think this, — I think that no good will be gained by hiding the truth. I don't know why, but I seem convinced that his safety depends upon *all* the truth being known. Don't imagine that I say this because I want to be acknowledged, Stevie. I ask no prouder title than that of your wife," she said, creeping close to his side, and hiding her dear face on his shoulder; "but I cannot think that any good can come from hiding the truth."

The next day Stephen kept his promise, and, accompanied by the Rector, drove Grace over to Poundbridge; and for the first time Lord Rossthorne pressed his

grandchild to his heart. Later on towards the evening Mr. Coleman arrived, with the barrister whom he had retained to conduct the defence, and a long consultation took place. Like Grace, but without concert with her, Lord Rossthorne was all for admitting the truth; but the lawyers would not hear of it.

"If your own evidence could be taken in the case, my Lord," said Mr. Sergeant Markham, "it might be different. As the law stands, a criminal prosecution such as this is like a game of chess, — the least blunder is fatal to success; and as one bad move may cost the best player his game, so one incautious admission may send an innocent man to the gallows. No, we will admit nothing. We will hold them to the strictest proof. By the way, I am told that Captain Frankpledge — is not that his name?"

"No; Frankland."

"Thank you. I am told, I say, that this gentleman made some demur about producing certain papers at the inquest. Is he a friendly witness?"

"Most friendly," replied Mr. Coleman. "Would you like to see him?"

"No, not I. Only let some one beg of him to make no objections now. We will not *help* their case, but we must not damage our own by appearing to withhold evidence. That would never do."

Next morning, Markham was up betimes, and had examined the *locus in quo* of the murder.

Afterwards, the hearing of the case was resumed in the Town Hall. The prisoner was allowed to sit at the table next to his counsel, and Stephen, with the Trehernes and Grace, who insisted upon being present, occupied a bench close behind him.

The finding of Brandron's body, and the appearance of the stranger amongst the school-boys on the green, had been proved at the first sitting by the same witnesses who had given evidence at the inquest, and the proceedings were now commenced by the cross-examination of the person who had deposed to having seen Lord Rossthorne coming out of the wood on the afternoon in question.

"Your name is Torrington, I believe, Sir?" began Mr. Sergeant Markham.

"It is, Sir."

"What are you, Mr. Torrington?"

"A foreign traveller in the service of Messrs. Staple, Stag, and Mansfield, of Cannon Street."

"Humph! And is your employment sufficiently light to allow of your reading the newspapers, Mr. Torrington?"

"I read the newspapers."

"Regularly?"

"Pretty well."

"There appeared a long account of the inquest in this case in most of the London papers, I think?"

"I dare say there did."

"You dare say, Sir! Did you not read it?"

"Yes, I have read it."

"When was it that you first informed the police that you could give the evidence we have just heard from your deposition?"

"Last Monday."

"Four days ago?"

Mr. Torrington bowed.

"Now, Sir, will you explain," said the learned sergeant, in his blandest manner, "how it is that you have kept silence on so important a subject from the 29th of last July until last Monday — a period of nearly two months?"

"Because I was abroad."

"When did you go abroad?"

"On the 29th of July. I was on my way to Poundbridge station, to take the train to Folkstone, when I saw Lord Rossthorne coming out of the wood."

"How do you know that the person you saw was his lordship?"

"I know it was!"

"But how, man? — how? You had no motive for noticing him?"

"Yes, I had! My brother-in—"

"I don't want to know anything about your brother," interposed the sergeant.

"Ah, but we do, Mr. Markham," said the presiding magistrate. "The witness was about to give his motives for noticing the prisoner. These may be very important. Go on, Mr. Torrington."

"My brother-in-law is a tenant of his lordship's," resumed the witness, "and he pointed him out to me a short time before in London. He was very good to my brother-in-law and my sister when they were in a bit of trouble last year, and I felt half inclined when I saw him there to thank him for it. Besides, he looked tired, and I thought, being on foot, he might condescend to take a seat in my gig, but he hurried past me, and I thought better of it, and did not like to intrude."

"You considered it impossible, I dare say," asked Markham, "that a man like Lord Rossthorne could have any part in such a crime?"

"I did not know that a crime had been committed till I returned from Spain, last Saturday."

"But you told me just now that you

read a report of the inquest in the papers."

"So I did, but only on Sunday, when I amused myself by looking over the back numbers of *The Observer* which had been delivered at my house during my absence."

"Humph! You have said that his lordship was coming from the wood?"

"Yes."

"And you were driving in the road?"

"I was."

"Whereabouts were you in the road when you first saw him?"

"Just at the turn before you come to the green."

"Where there are two heaps of stones?"

"There were no stones there then."

"Very well. I think we both mean the same spot — just about twenty yards short of the milestone?"

"Yes."

"Now, is there not a deep valley there, between the road and the wood?"

"There is. When I first saw him he was just mounting the slope."

"Very well. Are there not two pathways, right and left, at the bottom of that valley, as well as the one straight on, which leads past the church into the wood? Is this not so, Mr. Torrington?"

"I believe it is."

"You did not see him in the wood?"

"No."

"Then all you can really say is, that you saw him mounting the slope?"

"Coming from the wood," interposed Sir Joseph Sykes.

"I beg your worship's pardon," said the sergeant, sternly; "he might have come from the church, or from along either of the two paths, and not have been near the wood at all. Is that not so, Mr. Torrington?"

"He might have come from the church."

"Or from either of the two other paths?"

"Of course."

"You may stand down."

"No, wait one moment," interposed the attorney who conducted the prosecution. "You said, when you were first examined, that he was coming *from the wood*."

"Well, he has explained that," said the sergeant, impatiently.

"Not quite. Why did you say he was coming *from the wood*, witness?"

"Because he was coming from the direction of the wood."

"As also from the church. What reason had you for speaking of the wood?"

"I had a reason."

"What was it?"

"I thought he was coming from the wood?"

"But why, Mr. Torrington? — why?"

"Because he had a hazel switch in his hand, with the leaves on."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mr. Sergeant Markham. "Hazel switches grow in every hedge."

"But not in the church, Mr. Sergeant, or nearer than the wood," was the reply of the attorney.

The two justices put their heads together.

"The effect of the evidence of this witness," said the chairman, "has been so much modified since we sat last, that really, Mr. Snugly, unless you can prove something like motive —"

"I am about to do so, Sir," replied the attorney. "Call Captain Frankland."

Stephen stepped into the witness-box, and was sworn.

"Have you brought the papers you were subpoenaed to produce, Captain Frankland?"

"I have."

"Then produce a letter signed 'Susan,' which was found in the deceased Mr. Brandron's room at the 'Rising Sun,'"

The letter, which the reader will remember, was produced and read.

"Now a paper headed 'Copy,' written by the deceased himself."

This was also read.

"Did Brandron tell you —"

"Stop! stop, stop!" said the sergeant. "What he said is not evidence."

Mr. Lagger whispered something in the attorney's ear.

Lord Rossthorne wrote three lines on a scrap of paper, and handed it to his counsel.

"Mr. Brandron knew that he could not live when he spoke," said Snugly, addressing the bench; "and I submit to your worships that if I prove this fact, — and I can do so, — I am entitled to give evidence of what he said, as a dying declaration."

"Then I withdraw my objection," rejoined the sergeant, in a careless tone, and playing with his pen.

Those who knew the sergeant well, and were opposed to him, got nervous when he put on that tone, and flicked the table in that idle way.

"Well, then, did Brandron direct you to find any other papers relative to the subject of those already in evidence?"

"He did."

"Where were you to find them?"

"Hidden in a room at Mangerton Chase."

"Did you find them there?"

"I did."

"Exactly where he told you they would be?"

"Exactly."

"Where are they?"

Stephen handed them in; and all George Howell's letters and the marriage certificate were read by the clerk of the court. Last of all, the declaration made by Susan Alston, and witnessed by Brandron, respecting the birth and legitimacy of the child, was handed to the chairman.

"Have you any other questions to ask Captain Frankland, Mr. Snugly?" he said, when he had read it.

Mr. Snugly had not.

Sergeant Markham rose slowly, and pressing a piece of blotting-paper on his notes as he spoke, asked, —

"You were with Mr. Brandron, I think, from the time he was brought to the 'Rising Sun' till he died?"

"Almost until he died."

"Was he sensible?"

"I believe he was."

"At any rate, you found the papers just produced exactly where he told you they would be?"

"Yes; I have said so already."

"Now, Sir, I venture to ask you plainly, did he make any accusation against Lord Rossthorne?"

"He did not."

"Did he mention his name?"

"No."

"That will do, Captain Frankland." It was clear now why the sergeant had permitted what Brandron said on his death-bed to be given in evidence, even though by doing so he admitted the papers found in Mangerton Chase. Having got what he wanted, he then proceeded to attack what his adversary had gained.

"I am sure," he said, "that your honors will not allow your minds to be prejudiced by the contents of those documents until my client is connected with them in some way. It really seems to me to be a waste of time to go on in this fashion."

"If the learned gentleman will have a little patience, he shall see that I am proceeding quite regularly," said Snugly. "Call Charity Spence."

Charity Spence was called, and a very old woman dressed in rusty black hobbled into the witness-box.

"Are you a widow, Mrs. Spence?" demanded the attorney, loudly; for the witness was deaf.

"Ay."

"Was your husband, William Spence, parish clerk at Craigsleigh, in Derbyshire?"

"Ay, for two and for-ty year."

"Do you remember anything particular that happened in the year 1843?"

"Ay. We was sold up for debt. We opened a small ware and provision shop in the village, and failed."

"And so you remember the year 1843 well, Mrs. Spence — eh?"

"Ay, I do that."

"Just after the failure, did a gentleman — a stranger — call upon you?"

"Ay."

"Should you know him if you were to see him again?"

"I think I should, Sir."

"Look round the court, and tell me if you can recognize anybody here present as that gentleman."

Charity Spence looked round the court, scanning every face, till she came to the table in front of the bench. Then she pointed her long, claw-like hand at Lord Rossthorne, and said, —

"That's he!"

"How do you know him again?"

"By his proud face."

"Well, what did he do when he came to your house?"

"He got clacking wi' my master."

"You mean your husband?"

"It's all one in our parts! Am I to tell what he wanted?"

"Yes; tell it your own way. Go on, Mrs. Spence."

"Well, they got clacking — talking, you know. They'd met at the church, and clacked as they came along. When they came in my master sent me and the children out, so as we mightn't hear what was said. I went out wi' 'em, but was curious, and came in again round by the back door, and listened. They spoke so low that I could not justly hear what they said at first; but looking through a crack there was in the door, I saw the gentleman give my master five bank-notes, and then he said (and I heard him plainly), 'Remember,' said he, 'it's the first page. Remove it as neatly as you can, and I will come again this day week to see if you have kept your promise. If you have, you shall have the other fifty pounds.' That's what he said, and then he went away."

"Did he come again that day week?"

"Not to our shop; but soon afterwards my master brought back the things that had been seized by the bailiffs, and they cost nigh upon ninety pounds. He told me his

brother in London sent him the money; but I knew better."

"Now tell me, did your master, as you call him, ask you to make anything for him the day after the stranger came?"

"Ay; he told me to make a cup of strong paste, and I did make it, and gave it him."

"What did he do with it?"

"He took it out with him."

"Do you know where he went with it?"

"Not justly."

"When he went out, did he go towards the church?"

"Ay, he did go that way."

"I have no further questions to ask this witness," said Mr. Snugly, sitting down.

"But I have," said Mr. Sergeant Markham, springing up.

"Now, Mrs. Spence," he said, "remember you are upon your oath. Did the late William Spence, parish clerk of Craigsleigh, wear a night-cap?"

"Ay, to be sure."

"Did he put it on the night after you made him the paste, sixteen years ago?"

"Ay."

"I must request your honors to have these last two answers taken down," said the sergeant, with grave irony; "for they seem to me to be quite as important as any other part of her evidence."

"We shall see," replied the attorney, quietly. "Call Charles Ferrers."

And the new clerk of Mr. Thomas stepped forward with a big book under his arm, and was sworn. He deposed to being the present clerk of Craigsleigh Church, having the custody of the registry books, and described the condition they were in when he first found them.

"Upon discovering which," asked Mr. Snugly, "you did your best, I believe, to repair them?"

"Yes, Sir. I did not think there could be any harm in it."

"Nor was there. Now, in consequence of something that was said to you (no matter by whom, — unless, indeed, my learned friend wishes to know), did you discover that a page was missing out of one of the books?"

"I did; out of this one."

"What page was it?"

"The first."

"How do you know that?"

"Because each entry is numbered, and the first entry in this volume did not run on consecutively from the last entry in the preceding one."

"Have you got that one with you?"

"No; but it is in court."

"Very well. Did you search for the missing page?"

"I did, everywhere. I had no rest night nor day for ten days about it."

"In the course of your inquiries did you see the last witness, Mrs. Spence?"

"I did."

"And from something that she told you, did you make a further examination of the book you have in your hand?"

"Yes. I had suspicions that—"

"Never mind your suspicions; tell us what you did."

"I took off the back, and then I discovered that the first page — which hitherto I thought had been extracted — was pasted down on the cover, under the blue marbled paper which lined it inside. I soaked this lining with warm water, and removed it, as you see, and then disengaged the first leaf without separating it from the book, — merely undoing what had been done before, — and there it is."

"Your worship will perceive," said Mr. Snugley, handing up the book to the magistrates, "that the original of the mutilated certificate found, according to Brandron's statement, at Mangerton Chase, is entered on this page, and that the lady who contracted the secret marriage spoken of in the letters which have been read, was Lord Rossthorne's daughter. I submit now (after this evidence and that of Mrs. Spence), that I have connected the prisoner with all and every one of the documents in your hands, and suggested his motive for the murder of Brandron."

A dead silence reigned through the crowded court as Ferrers demonstrated the discovery he had made of the missing page, and when the attorney for the prosecution thus stated its portentous bearing upon the case, a thrill and a murmur ran through the spectators, and all eyes were turned on the prisoner.

Then Grace Lee rose, advanced to where he sat, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, turned round haughtily upon the crowd, with heaving bosom and flashing eyes, defying them. Another second, and Stevie was by her side.

"Do you ask Mr. Ferrers anything?" inquired the chairman of the prisoner's counsel, who, with Mr. Coleman, was closely scrutinizing the register which had been passed down to them.

"Of course I do, Sir!" was the reply, in the air of a man who is about to materially alter the impression which had penetrated even to the bench. "How long

have you been parish clerk at Craigsleigh, Mr. Ferrers?" he inquired.

"Only about eight months."

"Don't turn away. Look me in the face, if you please." The new clerk did, and met the cold, keen glance of the practised advocate; but only for a moment. "What were you before you came to Craigsleigh?" His nervousness was not lost upon Mr. Sergeant Markham.

"I was a clerk in London."

"To what church, may I ask?"

"Not in a church at all. I was in a merchant's office."

"Indeed! and how came you to leave that employment?"

The question was a chance one, but it hit the mark. Ferrers flushed crimson, and hung down his head.

"Come, Sir, you heard my question, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then be good enough to favor me with a reply." The sergeant paused for the reply which came not. "Well, then, I'll change the question, as you seem to find some difficulty in answering it. When did you leave that employment?"

"In April, 1856," replied Ferrers, with a sigh of relief. The keen eyes were on him.

"And you went to Craigsleigh eight months ago?"

"I was appointed early in last January."

"Now, Sir, upon your solemn oath, where were you, and what were you doing, from April, 1856, to January, 1859?"

"Am I obliged to answer this?" gasped the wretched man, wiping the perspiration from his brow, and appealing to the bench.

"Certainly, if it be pressed," replied the chairman; "though I don't see what it has to do with the case."

"Perhaps it would have been better to have waited till the question was answered, Sir, before you said that," observed Sergeant Markham, respectfully, but with cutting sarcasm. "Now, Mr. Ferrers, we are waiting for you. Where were you, and what were you doing, from April, 1856, to January, 1859?"

"I was living with friends part of the time."

"What part of it?"

"The latter part."

"Yes; but how long did you live with your friends?"

"Nearly six weeks."

"Well, that takes you back to about

Christmas last. Where were you from the year 1856 up to Christmas last?"

"Well, if you must know, I — I was in prison."

"Ha! ha! And what for, Mr. Ferrers?"

"For getting money on a bill of exchange."

"Which was forged?" Ferrers hung down his head, and was silent. "The long and the short of it is, then," said the counsel, "that, before becoming parish clerk at Craigleigh, you had endured a sentence of penal servitude for forging. You may go down, and take away your book, Mr. Ferrers. I am not surprised now at the neatness you displayed in *un-pasting* that leaf." And the learned sergeant sat down with a glance of triumph at the bench.

His satisfaction, however, was short-lived; for the next witness, the Rev. Mr. Thomas, proved that, years ago, long before Ferrers's time, he had noticed that the entries did not run on in consecutive numbers from the one book to the other; and then Mr. Sampson Lagger was called.

He deposed to having been present when Ferrers operated on the book, and corroborated all his statements respecting it. He then produced the most damning piece of evidence of all — the letter written by Brandron at Paris, on his way from India, appointing the interview at Westborough, and which had been found, addressed to the prisoner, amongst his papers at Rossthorne Castle!

"My client reserves his defence," said Mr. Sergeant Markham, in answer to the formal requisition from the bench.

"Then," said the chairman, "our duty is as painful as it is clear. Lord Rossthorne, you stand committed to Maidstone jail to take your trial for the wilful murder of John Everett Brandron."



CHAPTER XXXIV.

WINDING UP ON THE REEL.

LORD ROSSTHORNE was right when he said that his secret would soon be public property. The great world could talk of nothing else for a day or two after his commitment. The fellows who bawl out strange and wonderful news in the streets by night, got a shilling apiece for evening editions of the *Globe* and *Standard*, in

which the first report appeared. The morning papers took it up, and published leading articles upon it, in which the prisoner's guilt was proved to demonstration in the choicest language. To be sure, they wound up by requesting every one to suspend his judgment till the trial; but it did not seem to occur to the writers to suspend their own. In this free England of ours, every man is supposed to be innocent till he is found guilty; only if people will go and get charged with murder in the dull time of the year, when subjects for leading articles are scarce, they must take the consequences. The cheap illustrated journals rummaged amongst their old blocks to find some portrait of an elderly gentleman which would do for Lord Rossthorne; and the choice knots of pot-house politicians, who are good enough to return our metropolitan members to Parliament, were delighted at the idea of a peer of the realm — a member of the "haristocracy" — being sent to jail like a common felon. Then arose exciting discussions amongst the unlearned in all classes of society, about what would become of the prisoner if convicted, and there was no end to the absurdities propounded. A peer could not be hanged — yes, he could, — but the rope must be a silk one, provided on purpose by the Lord Mayor of London. The High Sheriff of Kent would have to act as executioner — no, bless your heart! the execution would be on Tower Hill. The prisoner was confined in the Tower — everybody knew that! What nonsense to talk about lords being hanged! — they were always beheaded (be-eaded was the usual way of pronouncing the word in the quarters where this idea was prevalent). "Them there bloated haristocrats was always treated different to other people." The learned in Lincoln's Inn and the Temple were full of excitement. Would the prisoner claim his privilege, and be tried by his peers? Would Parliament be sitting when he would be called up to plead to the indictment? Would there be a trial in Westminster Hall, with a Lord High Steward, and all the rest of it? Who would defend him? Would Markham lead? How much would he have on his brief? And so on. There were gentlemen who went about looking mysterious, shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders, and giving their friends to understand that they had known all about it long ago, but — ; and that they could disclose a great deal that had not yet been made public, only —. There were ladies

who gave it as their opinion that Grace Lee must be a very bold-faced young person to behave as she did in court. Lastly, there were fogies who got red in the face in their club windows, declaring that the whole thing was a conspiracy, by God! A got up thing to ruin Rossthorne. Rossthorne was a man of honor, Sir! He commit a murder? Not he! If he did, the fellow deserved it, by God! and that was all about it. Those confounded Radicals were ruining the country, and it would not be fit for a gentleman to live in soon. Afterwards, when no further disclosures were forthcoming, and all these good people had had their say, they found something else to talk about.

Few were more agreeably surprised and perplexed at the disclosures which were made, than our old friend Jim Riley. He, too, had been hunting, and at first hit upon the true secret. He was the first of the three visitors who called on Sister Mary, (whom he knew to be his mother's sister,) in the convent at Hull. To her he communicated his suspicions that poor Nancy was — as he called her — "a gentleman's child." He urged that the mysterious hints thrown out by his mother referred to her — there he was right; and that the miniature and other articles which he had found in the cottage at Westborough would, sooner or later, give a clue to her parentage — there he was wrong. Not much help did he get from his grim aunt, until after Stephen's visit, and Mr. Lagger's enforced interview. Then she sent for him, and was unnaturally communicative. She told him of her sister Lucy's fall whilst in the service of Lord Penruthyn, and of the child being placed in his (Jim's) mother's care.

"It was of this wretched infant," said Sister Mary, "of which your mother spoke. She was always a poor, weak-spirited fool, ready to take the burden of other people's sins upon herself; and this Nancy that you speak of may or may not be her own daughter. At any rate, your mother could not have spoken of *her*. She spoke of the child which was taken away from her by its father when you were still a boy; and the portrait and letter you have found relate to her. I will help you to trace out this child." Then she told him that a man named Williams had removed her from Westborough, and that she had been placed by him in a school, which she named, at Worthing. At that time Williams was clerk to an attorney in Bucklersbury, London; but she (Sister Mary) knew nothing more of him, or what had be-

come of the girl. Jim Riley traced the clue thus afforded, and identified her as Grace Lee — the more conclusively on account of the wonderful resemblance she bore to the miniature before mentioned; and the story told by the grim Sister of Charity being thus corroborated in an important particular, he made up his mind to believe it all. His next discovery was an important one. He found out that a gentleman had called at his mother's cottage the very day that he had quitted it with Nancy; that he had exhibited much surprise and consternation when he heard that Mrs. Riley was dead, and that her son had carried off the imbecile woman who passed as her daughter. In the course of his inquiries as to who this person was, what he was like, and where he had come from, made of the neighbors and at the railway-stations, he encountered Mr. Lagger. By this time the detective had obtained that evidence which connected Lord Rossthorne with Brandron, and pointed him out as the person whom the latter had summoned to Westborough. He, consequently, had ceased to "want" Jim as a principal in the great murder case, but he was very glad to find him, and have him ready to produce in court at the trial; because his presence there would exclude one important topic which might be urged in defence of the prisoner.

"If you'd a kept out of the way, Jim," explained Mr. Lagger, "they'd a sed, 'Where's Jim Riley?' — that's what they'd a sed. They'd a sed, 'You go and take a nobleman of high character into custody, because he was seen about the spot that day, and you don't look arter a travelling tinker, who *has* bin in trouble, who was thereabouts too!' Where is this 'ere travelling tinker? Produce him. Have you searched for him? Well, if you have *not*, you've ne-glected your dooty, and in his absence there is a reasonable doubt that the prisoner is guilty. If you *have*, and cannot find him, there is reasonable cause to believe that he has bolted because he is guilty; and in either case, the prisoner might get off. I don't intend this 'ere prisoner to get off. I intend to con-vict him, and then to re-tire into private life with my little niece. Therefore you and me will keep company, Jim, and be very good friends, and help each other. Now, *you've* got a little game of your own, *you have*," continued the detective, winking his right eye and jerking his elbow into Jim's ribs. "Tell me what it is, and I'll help you."

After a little demur Jim did tell him,

and, in return for his confidence, and certain useful information which he incidentally gave, he received the important news, that the gentleman who had called at Mrs. Riley's cottage was Sir George Tremlett, of Tremlett Towers.

It must be admitted that our worthy Jim's motives in seeking and following up these discoveries, were not of unmixed purity. He felt kindly enough towards poor Nancy, but the thought that he should be able to make a good bargain on his own account, with those who might feel it inconvenient to recognize her, was present to his mind when he commenced his researches; and great was his disappointment afterwards at finding what he had thought the *real* scent about to be disclosed by others. He was, therefore, not dissatisfied with the evidence he heard in Poundbridge Town Hall—evidence which left his chances exactly as they were when Sister Mary diverted his search from the right direction.

And why did she do this? Well, it never was exactly cleared up; and she was not the sort of woman to volunteer an explanation. A story was, certainly, put forward, that she acted under the orders of her superiors, and notably of the gentleman who lived in those sumptuous apartments in St. James's; and that she had deceived Jim Riley and Stephen for the purpose of preventing the Rossthorne estates from passing away from the Corytons, (who were Roman Catholics,) as would be the case if Grace Lee's legitimacy were established. I place no reliance whatever in such an idle conjecture, and think I can trace it to its source—a foul one, from which springs much foolish and vulgar abuse of a religion which is, at all events, entitled to our respect, however much we may differ from its teaching. No, I believe that Sister Mary had exclusive information, which was partly correct and partly incorrect; and that the conviction that the child which was taken away from her sister Susan was really her sister Lucy's offspring, having once entered her obstinate head, no argument or consideration could remove it. She was sent to Westborough to take possession of Mrs. Riley's cottage—the lease of which had several years yet to run; she heard people chattering about Stephen and Grace—as people will chatter in small country places; or, happening to see them that afternoon, wandering, lover-like, in the wood, drew her own deductions, and gave her terrible and unnecessary warning conscientiously. It was from her that Mr. Lagger learned

that the "Susan" who corresponded with Brandron was Mrs. Riley, of Westborough; and even he was thrown off the right tack by the answers she gave him whilst under the screw, on the day when poor Patty Marsh lost her sailor sweetheart. Hence the erroneous deductions which he drew from George Howell's letters. Has the reader forgotten the hungry-looking tramp who passed by where Stephen and the detective sat, just when the latter was about to draw those deductions? There were others which this poor fever-stricken wretch could have disposed of, if he had heard what was said on that occasion.

All doubt, however, as to Nancy's birth and parentage was removed the night after Lord Rossthorne's commitment, when, after a long conference with Stevie, Sir George Tremlett sent for Jim Riley, and claimed her as his child. The fears of a discovery, which had haunted him ever since his marriage, were now removed; and he could explain to Stevie, in faltering tones, and with averted looks, the mistaken inference he had drawn from his having exclaimed, "Good God! Stevie, you will not betray me?" when told by the latter that the secret of his visit to Westborough was known.

Great, as you may imagine, was the excitement in Little Union Street when the news about Nancy was brought; and universal were the regrets felt by Mrs. Wantley and her family, when, three days afterwards, the poor girl was removed to a quiet little lodging near Hampstead, which her father had taken for her. Even the fair and haughty Flora expressed herself graciously on that occasion, and hinted the gratuitous services of Mr. Cornelius Bruffor, the chemist next door, to Stephen on Nancy's behalf. Mr. Cornelius Bruffor was the abject slave of Miss Flora Wantley, upon the strength of a promise lately obtained, after months of devotion, that she would swear to love, honor, and obey him, as soon as he could establish a private practice which should be sufficiently remunerative to enable him to give up the shop. Miss Wantley, who had maintained an elegant appearance the greater part of her life from the sale of penny newspapers, could not "abide" marrying a shopkeeper. To Mr. Bruffor's credit be it said, that he had long since declared that Nancy must have country air, generous diet, and a tonic treatment—recommendations which were echoed by the celebrated doctor whom Stevie called in, to the great delight of the little chemist and druggist. So, as I have said,

the patient was taken off to Hampstead, and Helen — her first and best ally — went with her.

Poor Nancy ! they called her an idiot down in Westborough. Idiocy was not her affliction. She was merely of weak mind from her birth, and nothing had been done to rouse her from the mental lethargy into which she sank, and which grew upon her, until the last spark of sanity was almost extinguished. Her entire change of life, and the bustle of the little shop, did wonders in developing her dormant intellect ; but the atmosphere of Little Union Street and Ruby Row was almost fatal to the bodily health of one who had spent her life from infancy upwards amidst the hop-gardens and pleasant pastures of breezy, fragrant Kent. As the strength of her mind increased, so — only in a greater and swifter ratio — did her physical strength seem to die away and leave her. She never thoroughly recovered from the exhaustion of that long tramp from Westborough, and the effect of sleeping in wet clothes in the open air. It was only on his arrival in London that honest Jim obtained the money which he had paid Mrs. Wantley. He was all but destitute when he left his mother's cottage, (though he left money there which he might have taken,) and could not afford to pay for a night's lodging on his way. Nancy was a stout, strong, hale woman when she started on that journey, and when Stephen saw her two months afterwards he could hardly recognize her, so fair and delicate did she look.

Good Mrs. Wantley was very sorry to lose her charge ; nor was this her only grievance about this time. Her eldest son had been discharged from jail — a cripple, poor fellow, for life — and at first had gladdened her heart by his improved language and conduct ; but a great change came over him shortly after Nancy's departure. He absented himself all day from the little shop, never returning, except to sleep and take his meals. Sometimes he would ask to have his dinner packed up in a basin, and he would limp away with it in the morning, and never come back till dark. He was incessantly begging money of his mother, and one day she saw him emerging from the pawn-broker's at the corner, and next Sunday noticed, to her sorrow, that he appeared in his every-day suit. In vain she scolded, in vain she coaxed. He would not tell where he spent his time and his money. He tried to laugh off his mother's anxiety, and gave her evasive answers. It was all

right ; he was not up to any harm. He would tell her about it some day ; and so on.

But how came he to have the opportunity of thus distressing his worthy parent ? Why was he not expiating in Maidstone Jail his defeated attempt to escape from his punishment in that prison ? Was Jim Riley wrong in stating that he would be tried for that offence ? No ; Robert Wantley *was* tried, and acquitted. What, acquitted ? when he was found groaning under the wall with a dislocated hip, dressed in his prison dress, and with a rope made of his bed-clothes clutched broken in his hand ! He was indeed ; and when you hear why this happened, you can, if you please, moralize upon the glorious uncertainty of the law.

Upon several of the circuits into which England is divided for judicial purposes, there were — there may be now, for aught I know — certain young gentlemen of good birth and fortune, who attend for the purpose of amusing themselves and extending the circle of their acquaintance ; who have no intention — as, indeed, they have no necessity — to follow the law as a profession, but who see no impropriety in standing in the way of hard-working, necessitous men who depend upon it for their bread and cheese, and thus snatching a few guineas from their hands. These interlopers are, for the most part, very ignorant of their profession, and would avoid a difficult brief as they would a friend who wore an old coat. Providence, however, has created for them a certain class of business in the criminal assize courts, which a boy of fourteen years old and average impudence could manage, and has given a good deal of this for distribution into the hands of a class of men who take delight in gratifying rich young gentlemen — sons and nephews of country squires — and giving briefs and fees to those who don't deserve the one nor require the other. Unto such a person, who lounged yawning into court for the first time in the day about one o'clock, came an attorney of the order lately indicated, who presented him with the brief against Robert Wantley for an escape, and requested that he would draw the indictment, as the circumstances made it rather a special one. Our fortunate and fashionable young friend, not being able to do this himself, got an unfashionable, and, consequently, unfortunate fellow-barrister, who knew his business, to do it for him ; learned his brief by heart, and invited half a dozen elegant ladies, his relations

in the county, to attend the trial, and see what a great lawyer he was. Alas! the brief — all full of flourishes, and got up with the most elegant penmanship — omitted to state any evidence upon an important allegation, which the unfashionable drawer of the indictment had added as a matter of course — an allegation for which any one, with even an elementary knowledge of his profession, would have been prepared. Our fashionable friend was not prepared for it. He did not know what the judge meant when he told him he had not proved his case. Barristers to the left of him, barristers to the right of him, barristers behind him, prompted and wondered; but, though confident enough as long as he could read question after question off his brief, he became hopelessly flustered when the hitch came, — blundered, flushed, stammered, and sat down, with the court whirling around him, so that he could not hear the sharp, laconic words in which the judge told the jury that they must acquit Robert Wantley, and that no costs would be allowed in the case, on account of the slovenly manner in which it had been conducted. "If people will give business to pipples who don't understand it, they must take the consequences," said his lordship, in an under voice, to the high sheriff. "Besides," added he, "the poor devil is a cripple for life; surely he's punished enough. Let 'um go." Rough justice, my lord, and thank you for it. Crime is a rough thing, and cannot be justly measured with an ivory foot-rule or a pint of rose-water. You and I shall never meet again with wigs upon our heads, but I shall not forget how kindly and justly — how fearlessly and well I have seen you judge poor weak human nature; and who knows but that some of our countrymen may profit by the teaching I have received at your hands.

So Bob Wantley was acquitted, and returned to his home, only to relapse, after a time, as his poor, fond mother feared, into the bad habits which had caused his ruin. Nothing that she could say or do would keep him at home. She locked him up in his room, and he broke open the door. She hid his crutch from him, and he crawled out without it, returning at night in fearful pain from the exertion. She went down on her knees, and implored him with tears in her eyes not to leave her thus, or, at any rate, to tell her where he went, and what he did, all those long days. He kissed her, laughed, said it was all right; he was up to no harm; she

should know about it some day, and so on, as before; slipped by her, and passed out into the street, carrying his dinner with him. One day she set his brother Charley — then enjoying his long vacation — to follow the truant; and Charley, who was a sharp lad, tracked him till he saw him enter a public-house, from which, though he watched the door for five hours, Charley did not see him emerge. Charged with spending his time there in bad company, the culprit laughed, and told her he had known that Charley was dogging his steps, and had therefore defeated him by entering that public-house, and dodging immediately through a side door into the next street, whilst the confiding brother remained outside.

"I'll tell you all, mother," said Bob, "when the right time comes; but you won't get a word from me now, and you sha'n't find out. There!"

L'homme propose! Mrs. Wantley was not deficient in that quality which we lords of the creation call "obstinacy," when found in the female mind. We have a more dignified name for it, I think, when it moves in our own lofty bosoms. The good woman determined to save her son, and, as a necessary preliminary, to find out where and with whom he spent his time; therefore, as Charley had failed in this behalf, she resolved to seek a more skilful ally. The proceedings at the trial at Westborough had revealed her erratic lodger in his true character, and to him she applied, not as a policeman, but as a friend, for advice and assistance.

Mr. Lagger turned the subject over in his mind, and after premising that the business was to be considered as altogether private, and on no account to deter his retirement, consented to undertake it. Very simple was Master Bob's riddle to Mr. Sampson Lagger, and those whose services that lynx-eyed person could command. He had only to tell the constable on duty in Ruby Row to watch where he went, and to pass on the word.

"He goes to a lodging-house in Ryder Street, Sir," said a police constable on that beat. "He was passed on to me by X 52, who had him from B 18."

"Ha! Ryder Street, is it?" mused Mr. Lagger; "and what does he do there?"

"Goes to see a man who's very ill with fever, or something bad. Takes him his dinner and that."

"Who's the man?"

"Don't know. Got no instructions to identify him."

"No more you didn't. Quite right,

X 52 ; you stick to your instructions, and then you won't burn your fingers. Who keeps the lodgings-house ? "

" Jem Taylor."

" What, cranky Taylor ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" Ah ! then he ain't a very good character, I should think. I'll go and see him myself," said Mr. Lagger. " What time does young Wantley get there in the mornin' ? "

" About half-past nine."

" Very well. Now you go to cranky Taylor, and you sez — sez you, ' Mr. Lagger — him as knowed you about the gold-dust case — is a-comin' to your house to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and he don't want no public reception. He knows you, he does ; and you knows him pretty well now — you'll know him better if you tries to play any little games with him. He wants the room next to where this 'ere sick man is, all to himself, and he can't exactly say for how long. He'll be there every day, till he sez he's not a-comin' any more, and nobody's to know he's there.' D'y'e understand ? "

X 52 nodded. He was a man of few words.

" Very well, then ; you go and do it."

X 52 went and did it.

The following morning Mr. Lagger paid his promised visit to " cranky " Taylor — and went again, and again, and again, every day.

The room in Ryder Street where Bob Wantley passed so much of his time was a wretched den at the very top of the house, lighted by one garret window. Its furniture consisted of one chair which had once been rush-bottomed, and a wretched straw mattress stretched on the floor, in the corner where fell the few sunbeams that struggled in through the neighbouring chimneys. On this mattress, covered only with a tattered patchwork quilt, lay the tramp already twice mentioned in this history, looking more hungry, more hopeless, more ill than ever.

" Damn you ! " he cried, raising himself on his elbow, as Bob Wantley limped into the room, " where have you been all this time ? "

" It's only just struck ten, Alf," said the latter, in a soothing tone. " Lie down, that's a good fellow."

" You talk to me as though I were a dog," replied the other, sinking back with a groan. " Have you brought me anything to eat ? "

" Yes, Alf, and some tea."

" Tea be damned ! Have you got any money ? "

" No. I told you yesterday that mother won't give me any more, and — "

" Why the hell don't you steal some then ? " exclaimed the tramp, turning upon him savagely.

" Now, I say, Alf, none of that. I get into trouble enough about what I do for you, as it is. You didn't talk like that a fortnight ago, when I found you a'most dying in the street."

" I wish you had left me to die. Why didn't you ? " said the tramp, turning surlily aside.

" Because you once did me a good turn, Alf, though it didn't come about as you expected. Breaking out of Maidstone jail made a cripple of me ; but it was the best thing as could have happened. I thank God, Alf Blakeley, that I was lamed and taken back."

" I wish to God I had been caught too. Oh, Lord ! I do," moaned the sick man, clasping his wasted hands. " Oh, Lord, if I'd only had been taken like you and the prowler, and locked up again, I'd not have minded if it had bin for good." There was a wild earnestness in his tone which startled Bob Wantley.

" Why don't you give yourself up, then ? " he said. " They'd put you in hospital, and cure you."

Blakeley shuddered. " No," he gasped, after a long pause, " it's too late now. Where's the doctor ? "

" He'll be here presently, but I have not got any money for him."

" And won't he give me any of that stuff as does me good without ? "

" He don't bring the physic ; he only orders it — gives me a paper to the shop."

" Tell them you'll pay 'em next week."

" No good ! We owe twelve and six-pence already. I tried 'em yesterday, but they'll give no more credit. It's awful dear, that stuff."

The sick man groaned.

" Bob, old fellow," he said at last, in a wheedling voice, " I must have some more ; it makes me strong, — and — and — next week I'll get well and work a bit. Can't you borrow a sovereign out of the till at home, Bob ? I wish I may die this very minute if I won't pay you back, and nobody'll be the wiser."

Bob rose from his seat with a gesture of disgust.

" Don't — don't — don't go," almost shrieked the tramp. " Damn you ! you know I go mad when I'm left alone. Stop, Bob — sit down again, old fellow, and — and — I must have more of that stuff or some brandy. I must."

"I tell you again I have no money to buy either."

"But I have, Bob," whispered the tramp, seizing his hand. "Can anybody hear us?"

"No."

"Just go to the door and see if anybody's about."

Bob did as he was desired. No one was stirring.

"I have some money, Bob — a little — just a little, but I haven't dared to change it. They'd not give a chap like me change for a ten-pound note."

"Ten pounds?"

"Yes. But they'd change it for *you*, Bob."

"It's a duffer!"

"No, no, no, s'elp me! It's a good un as ever came out of the Bank."

"Then why have you kept it hid all this time?"

"Cos I daren't show it. I've — I've starved with it in my pocket. It might be — it — it — But you'll take it and get some more of the stuff, Bob. I'll give you half, Bob — come now — if you'll get sova for it."

"Let me see it first."

The tramp raised himself as well as he could, crawled on his hands and knees to the top of the mattress where it joined the wall, and drew from a slit in the ticking a large, black leather pocket-book. This he opened with trembling hands, and a thick roll of bank-notes fell out.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHICH ENDS THIS STRANGE EVENT-FUL HISTORY.

IMMEDIATELY after his commitment Lord Rossthorne was removed to Maidstone jail. There was an attempt to hoot him as he stepped into the carriage that was to carry him, a prisoner, to Poundbridge station, but the sight of the pale but resolute girl who supported his faltering footsteps seemed to overawe the crowd which had assembled round the Town Hall, and the shouts of execration which had arisen as he appeared died away through a low murmur into silence as the vehicle drove off; and when Grace emerged, weeping, from the station to return to Kernden, those who had followed gave her a lusty cheer.

She did not remain long with the Trehernes. In a day or two good Mrs. Cole-

man arrived, by arrangement, and took her on to the county town, to a lodging which Stevie — who had accompanied the accused — had secured for them in the vicinity of the prison, so that Grace might be able to see her grandfather as long and as often as the regulations of the place permitted.

"I will not play the hypocrite, grand-papa," she said, at their first interview, nervously playing with his watch-chain the while, "and tell you that I love you. I don't love you — at least, I mean not yet; but —but you are the only creature in all the world that really belongs to me, and you are persecuted and in danger, and — and — I do believe you innocent, I do with all my heart." And she crept up towards him closer and closer as she spoke, till her dear head rested on his shoulder, and he clasped her passionately to his breast.

"Ah, child, child," he cried, "you know not what fierce coals of fire every caress, every kind word heaps upon my head!"

The night that Mrs. Coleman and Grace arrived, Stephen took his departure. No one thought of asking him whither, as all knew so well where his loving heart would lead him. Grace turned a little pale, though, as a thought seemed to strike her whilst he was in the act of wishing her good-by; she grasped his hand tightly, and whispered in his ear.

"What, dearie," he replied, "with such a man? No, you may trust me in spite of any provocation. I will write often. I shall be back long before the trial." And with that he left her.

He followed a clue he had obtained, and found his father's wife luxuriously settled in Paris. She screamed and hid her face when he entered the room; and, oh, what were they going to do to her? Oh, were they going to send her to prison? Oh, it was a shame to break in upon her suddenly like that. Then Rhoda Lady Tremlett cried, and declared that Colonel Vincent Champneys was a wicked, bad man; that she had not left home of her own accord; that he had fascinated her; that he was *so* kind — he had taken a box at the grand opera for her, and was going to marry her directly a divorce could be obtained. Thus the poor weak creature wavered, alternately inveighing against her seducer, and lavishing the most affectionate epithets upon him. Finally she told Stephen that it was all his fault. If he had remained at "the Towers" she would have clung to him, confessed the hold that Champneys was obtaining over her mind, and by his assistance have broken loose from it.

Then Stevie placed before her kindly,

but without mincing matters, the position in which she had placed herself. He told her that she could never retrieve that from which she had voluntarily fallen, but that she might and could escape from sinking to the depths into which the villain who had been her tempter sought to drag her. He told her that Champneys could not marry her, even when Sir George obtained a divorce, as he was already married, and had left his wife — a young and friendless girl — behind him in India, in the power of the rajah he had served. In short, he had sold her. At this Lady Tremlett became indignant, vowed that his wife must have been a wicked, abandoned creature — that "dear Vincent" had told her so; and, oh, would they take her back home, and not say anything about what she had done? Would they promise to send away "that Francis?" (not dearest Francis now). If they would send him away, she would come home and be good, and forgive everybody.

How was it possible to reason with a woman like this?

But Stevie persevered. Colonel Champneys — as he called himself — had gone to England on business, and was not expected to return for a week; consequently Stevie had his stepmother all to himself that day. He told her that it was impossible that she could again be received by his father or her former friends; that she could not return to her old home, but that a new one where she might live in respectability could be made for her; and implored her, by all her hopes of happiness in this world and the next, to quit her betrayer, and go where he (Stephen) would take her. To his great joy she at last assented, albeit somewhat sulkily, and promised to be ready early the next morning to accompany him wherever he pleased.

Stevie went back to his hotel a happy man, and was wakened the next day by being presented with the following letter:

"DEAREST STEVIE,

"It was very unkind of you to speak to me as you did yesterday, and you had no right to do it. You never treated me properly, any of you, and I shall not go back to be taunted and abused. I don't believe a word of what you say against my dearest Vincent, and will not give him up for any one. Beside, I like living in Paris.

"Your affectionate
"RHODA CHAMPNEYS.

"P. S. — It's no use coming to my house, because I have left it to join dearest Vincent, but I will not tell you where."

Let us drop the curtain, if you please, on the future history of Rhoda, sometime Lady Tremlett, merely stating that Champneys eventually married her — his first wife having died of a broken heart — and that she experienced another and widely different phase in the life of a woman who is married for her money. She received no physical ill-usage; her life was too valuable to her new lord and veritable master for that; but she lived to repent bitterly the lot she had inflicted upon herself, and, what was a better sign, perhaps the lot which she had inflicted on her former husband.

Returning from his useless errand, Stephen met Mr. Coleman in London, and received from him a somewhat startling proposition.

"I'm very glad you're come back, my dear boy," said his old friend; "and really I had little hopes that you would do any good. When a fellow like Champneys gets an influence over a woman, it is not to be conquered. Besides one must consult appearances in these matters. It will not do to let the world suppose that we want to win Lady Tremlett back, because she takes all her fortune with her."

"Can you suppose that I gave the wretched money a thought?" demanded Stevie, with indignation.

"I? No. But there are those who would. We have plenty of trouble on our hands already, without coveting more. — Enough of this. It is not what I wanted to speak to you about. Now be practical and worldly, Stevie, for half an hour, and put all your fine romantic notions in your pocket, merely remembering that you have duties towards others — towards those who may come after you, and that you must think of them and their interests whilst you form your own arrangements."

"Go on. There's something disagreeable coming, I can see."

"Well, I don't think you have any right to think it so. It is simply this, — Lord Rossthorne wishes you and Grace to be married at once."

Stephen was too astonished to reply.

"You see, my boy," the attorney continued, laying a hand upon Stevie's shoulder, "we, who know Lord Rossthorne, are pretty sure that he is innocent; but there is an awfully strong case against him. I have tried and tested every titile of the chain of evidence, and so has Markham, and we can find no flaw. It is all circumstantial, certainly; but it all points one way, and there is no gap in it. He may

be convicted — he thinks so himself; and if he is, all his property will be forfeited to the crown; whereas now he can make it over to his daughter on her marriage, and thus save it in any event."

"And do you think that Grace would consent to become my wife with this charge hanging over her grandfather's head, for fifty estates? If you do, you little know her."

"I know that you are a pair of proud, wilful children," replied Mr. Coleman. "I know also that it is very difficult to make such people listen to common sense. If Grace were not a woman, I could convince her in ten minutes of the propriety of this step. I could *convince* her as it is; but she would not own to a conviction. It would not be right — it would not be maid-only that she should. You must persuade her."

"What, before I am persuaded myself?"

"Stevie, if a dying man, whom you loved, made a request that would cost you nothing but to gulp down some foolish pride, would you refuse him?"

"I think I would not; but —"

"Do you love Lord Rossthorne?"

"Ay, that I do — through all and in spite of all. I blame him — I cannot help doing so — for much that he has done; but I pity, and — and — I do love him almost like a father. I oughtn't to do so, I know; but I can't help it, and there's an end of it."

"I fear that we must consider him as a dying man, Stevie; for if he be found guilty of this crime, no power on earth can save him from the gallows."

Stephen shuddered.

"You must go to him," Coleman resumed, "and hear patiently what he has to say. You would not scruple to give Grace your name, if the worst came to the worst, would you?"

"How can you ask such a question?"

"Have you ever considered that, after such a disaster, *she* might withdraw her consent, for your sake, knowing your pride, and fearing that you would be some day ashamed at the thought that a felon's blood flowed in your children's veins?"

"Good heavens! no. Has she said anything that —"

"No; she has said nothing. She does not know yet of the proposition. Pray understand me, that I am only hinting at what may be possible — perhaps probable. It is all well that you should see the case from both sides. Come, come, man, be reasonable. You win a good, beautiful wife and a fine estate, and what do you lose? Noth-

ing but a grand wedding! Do you think that your married life will be any the happier because you will be poor and your wife subjected to the climate and hardships of an Indian life?"

"But it will seem so unfeeling," mused Stevie. The last argument had struck home.

"What will?"

"Why, marrying when he is in such danger."

"Do you fancy that it shows good feeling to refuse the repeated and earnest prayers of one in such a position?"

"No, of course not; but —"

"There you are with your 'buts' again. Take the next train to Maidstone, Stevie. See Rossthorne as soon as you can, and show your good feeling towards him by doing what he has at heart, and easing his mind of a great anxiety. Goodness knows that he has enough cause for anxiety which you cannot remove. Be off now, like a good fellow, and, Stephen, *be sensible*."

Stevie went, and if yielding to such entreaties as the imprisoned peer made be a sign of sense, he was "sensible;" and, after some trouble, Grace became so too. Her chief difficulty was to acknowledge the necessity for the proposed step. She had made up her mind that her grandfather was innocent, and could not be brought to see that others might form a different opinion. "What is the use of pretending that he killed poor Mr. Brandron, because he wanted me to be owned, and my dear mother's marriage established? Why, these are the very things which, for years and years, poor grandpapa yearned to do, only he thought that the proofs had been destroyed! Do you mean to say that any jury would say he was guilty when this was proved?"

It was little use telling her that this could not be proved, as the law does not allow a prisoner to give evidence on his own behalf, and no one else could know the fact.

"Well, then," she argued, "if he is not allowed to swear it, he can say it, and that will be enough." Grace, you will remember, is a woman, and was — what shall I call it? — obstinate? No doubt — very obstinate.

At last she consented that the marriage should come off in a fortnight, and, at the urgent request of the Trehernes, it was arranged that it should take place at the Rectory.

"It will be the last marriage service, most likely, that I shall ever perform in my old church," said the rector, "and I

shall never have performed one with greater pleasure or more confidence."

In the mean time the conveyancers were set to work, and the deeds, which were to make Grace a rich bride, were duly prepared, signed, sealed, and delivered.

"You will go to Rossthorne after the ceremony, Stevie," said the prisoner, "and take possession of the old place. Remember, it and its lands are *yours*. They have settled the Welsh property, and some of the money in the funds, on Grace and her children; but, much as I know she loves and reveres you, I will not let her own a stone of the house in which her husband will live, nor an acre of the soil from which his influence will be derived."

So Grace returned to Kernden a week before the appointed day, and Stephen betook himself to London, to make sundry necessary arrangements for his marriage, and for his father's future comfort. Now that his wife had left him, the supposed great squire — the apparent owner of Tremlett Towers and all they looked down upon — the titled head of one of the most ancient families in England had exactly £150 a year to support himself and his afflicted daughter!

Do I ask your sympathies for him? Not I. I think that he deserved all his misfortunes; but I do not the less condemn the system which crushed him down under the will and pleasure of his wife and his son — a system which has brought ruin upon many a better man than he, and will continue to do so as long as it is persevered in.

At Sir George's lodgings near Hamps-
stead, Stevie encountered Mrs. Wantley, who had called "humbly to inquire," as she said, "after Miss Nancy." The fresher air, and the sight of the flowers in the pleasant little garden which surrounded the house, had done something for her, but not much. Every day found her more languid than its predecessor, and marked more deeply the hectic flush upon her wasted cheeks — once so rosy and so full. The good woman was very proud to answer all Stevie's questions about the little shop and all her family, but heaved a deep sigh when Bob's name was mentioned.

"Oh, Sir," she said, with tears in her eyes, "he's deceiving his poor mother. He's got into bad company again. He's even deceived Mr. Lagger, who was so good as to try and find out where he went all day, and what he did. Mr. Lagger knows no more about him than we do. Ah! he's very deep, is Bob — very — very," concluded poor Mrs. Wantley, with a deep sigh.

This conversation took place the day but one after that already given between this same "deep" Master Bob and Alf Blakeley, the sick man in the Ryden Street lodging-house. It will, therefore, be apparent that Mrs. Wantley was mistaken, and that Mr. Sampson Lagger had found out something respecting the truant, only the right time for disclosing it had not yet arrived.

The next sun rose on Stephen Frankland's wedding day. There was to be no fuss — no display. Sir George Tremlett was to give away the bride; Gertrude and Maud Treherne, Laura and Jane Coleman, were bridesmaids, and Cuddy Lindsay consented to act as best man, provided that Jackson were associated with him — though in an inferior position — to "do the brute force," in case "that Stevie" ran restive and refused to come up to the scratch.

I must do Stevie the justice to record that he required no such compulsion, and that he behaved very much like a rational being anterior to and during the ceremony. It just suited him that it should be thus quietly performed, — that no one but dear friends should watch whilst he plighted his faith, — that Grace should not be flustered and stared at by a pack of strangers, — that there should be no grand breakfast and stupid speech-making when all was over. Nothing but the cause of this privacy disturbed him, and his dear little bride quite shared his ideas on this subject. Ah! if he — the absent one, the prisoner — could but have been there to give them his blessing, what more could they have asked to render their happiness complete?

Well, the little wedding party has assembled on the Rectory lawn; Grace — dressed in simple white — has come shily creeping out, accompanied by her bridesmaids. She has taken Sir George Tremlett's arm, and they have passed down the aisle of the old village church to the altar, where Mr. Treherne, Stevie, and his footman are awaiting them. The service is begun, and just before the most interesting part a noise is heard, as of some one entering the church, and hurrying down the side aisle.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" inquires the clergyman.

Sir George is on the point of replying, "I do," when a hand is placed on his shoulder, and a voice whispers in his ear, —

"I beg your pardon. I know it was so arranged, but may not I?"

It is Lord Rossthorne who speaks. Neither bride nor bridegroom hear or see him, for their eyes are downcast, and he stands behind them. A significant gesture from him commands silence to the rest of the assembled friends, and the ceremony continues. He places the little trembling hand of our dear Grace in Stephen's strong, honest hand — the irrevocable "I will" is said, the ring is given, and those whom God joined that day were never put asunder, — no not by the breadth of one thought.

I will leave you to imagine the surprise of the happy pair when, upon rising from where they had knelt, and turning to go into the vestry, they saw who had joined the party. The explanation then given was a short one. The real murderer of John Brandron had been discovered, and, moreover, had confessed the crime! Besides which, a pocket-book bearing Brandron's name, containing bank-notes to a considerable amount; a letter from Lord Rossthorne, stating that he would not fail to meet him at the appointed spot, and a memorandum stating his address in London, had been found in the culprit's possession, and fully corroborated his story.

This was the pocket-book which Brandron had asked for shortly before his death, and which could not be found. It was the pocket-book which Alfred Blakeley, the escaped convict, had drawn from the ticking of his mattress, and which had been seized the next moment by Mr. Sampson Lagger, who had been so long watching what passed between the sick man and his guardian friend, Bob Wantley.

The account subsequently given of himself by this wretch was a horrible one. — Having made good his escape from the jail, he wandered about the country — never daring to enter a town or village — hiding during the day, and prowling here and there in search of food at night. For four days he had no food but half a loaf of bread, which he stole from the window-sill of a laborer's cottage, and such fruit as he could pluck from the hedges. He was hiding in Westborough Wood on the 29th of July. He saw Lord Rossthorne and Brandron enter it. He overheard part of their conversation — the part in which the former had solemnly promised to perform the act of justice demanded of him. He saw him also write his address on a slip of paper, which Brandron put away in his pocket-book. As he opened it the roll of bank-notes was disclosed, and in those the fugitive saw escape, safety, wealth, but there was only one means of obtaining

them — murder! Lord Rossthorne left the wood, and Brandron sat down on the corner of the old sawpit, lost in thought.

Let us pass over the sickening details of the scene which followed. The assassin secured — to his idea — unbounded wealth, but, as we know, dared not make use of it, but wandered over the country a more wretched outcast than before, till the fever struck him, and he staggered back into the streets of London, to be picked up by Bob Wantley, and sustained by him for old acquaintance' sake, till the discovery was made.

"He'll live to be tried, Sir," said Mr. Lagger, who had accompanied Lord Rossthorne to the church, "but I don't suppose he'll last out. He'll cheat the gallows, I believe. And all the better, I fancy, Captain. You see by con-victing him I collar the £500 reward, and mean to re-tire into private life along o' my little niece, God bless her! When one's in the service, dooty's dooty all the world over, but blood-money ain't a pleasant thing to re-tire upon — is it now?"

Stephen and all present assented.

"So if he ain't hanged I shall give half of it to young Bob Wantley, (who did not know anything about what he done,) and if he is, why I shall give up all."

"In either case you shall not be a loser," said the peer; and then he told them how Lagger — immediately upon hearing Blakeley's confession — had instructed an attorney to apply at judges' chambers for his (the speaker's) admission to bail; how the application was granted, and sufficient security obtained; and how the good-hearted detective himself had hastened to Maidstone with the order which once more made him a free man.

For these services Mr. Lagger declined all thanks.

"You see, my Lord," he said, "I fancied myself a deuced clever fellow, and thought that I should end my career like the last scene in a pantomime, all fiz and shine, by hanging a peer of parliament; but I made a mull of it — that's what I made. There's no denying of it. I was bound thereby to set it right, and I did so, and that's all about it. — I wish you joy, Miss, with all my heart," he continued, turning to the bride, "and you too, Captain. Ladies and gentlemen, your servant!" and with a duck of his head and a scrape, Mr. Sampson Lagger took his leave, and the bridal party returned to the Rectory.

Lord Rossthorne's admission to bail was tantamount to an acquittal. The grand-

jury at the assizes threw out the bill against him, and put Alfred Blakeley on his trial for wilful murder. He pleaded guilty; but, as his captor predicted, never lived to be executed. He was in a dying state when carried into the dock to plead.

Nevertheless, Lord Rossthorne took a hint given to him by the friendly detective, and went abroad immediately after Stephen's marriage.

"It ain't pleasant, my Lord, to rake up old scores," said Mr. Laggar, as they came along together from the station, "but there's that affair of the registers, you know. People *might* make a fuss about it, and if I might be so bold as to suggest that you should make yourself scarce in this 'ere country for a year or so, I don't think you'd find it amiss. I should think, now, that the air of Spain would be uncommon good for your complaint," he concluded, with his head on one side, and the old magpie look upon him.

What more have I to tell? Very little. You would like to know, perhaps, what became of our "dearest Francis." Do you think he turned out to be a hypocrite, and came to a bad end? Bless you, no such thing. He continued to be the highly accomplished, self-confident gentleman which we have hitherto found him. His acts were always founded "upon principle." He took unto himself a wife, and schooled her down to his own level. There is not a more proper, well-bred, heartless pair in all London than Mr. and Mrs. Tremlett. Their house is the best ordered and most disagreeable establishment you were ever in. The gentleman has got into Parliament for a northern borough, and the lady writes papers for the meetings of the Association for the Promotion of Social Science. The Tremlets do not visit the Franklands. Stephen, willing to forgive and forget, invited his half-brother to his wedding, and received in reply a pompous epistle, in which the writer said that the calamity which had fallen upon his family utterly unfitted him from sharing in any sort of revelry. (Stevie expressly stated that there would be nothing of the sort.) He congratulated him on his good fortune and "management"—suggesting, in his nasty little way, that he (Stevie) had known Grace to be Lord Rossthorne's grandchild from the first. So Mr. Tremlett did not grace the marriage with his presence, and its merriment did not suffer in consequence—the fact of the matter being, that the dear fellow was busy with his

lawyers, scheming how they could get a portion of his mother's fortune settled on him (poor innocent!), whom she had left upon the wide world with the beggarly three thousand a year, which was his by right on his coming of age.

Let us do him full justice. Out of this he offered his father an annuity of £100; which, however, was not accepted, Sir George Tremlett having taken up his quarters in a pretty villa close to Rossthorne Castle which had been furnished for him and poor Nancy by Stephen. Alas, poor Nancy! Small was the trouble she gave to any one, and it did not last for long.

The new rector of Questerthorpe was a lonely man for a short time in the spring following Stevie's marriage. Cuddy and Gigas were made the happiest of men on the same day, and two fairer brides than Gertrude and Maud Treherne never said "Amen" at the altar. The dream of dear old Mrs. Coleman's life was also realized about this time in the marriage of her eldest daughter with Ashton Neville. The beautiful Constance had already given her hand and heart to Percy Coryton; and I understand there is a probability of her wearing the coronet of a baroness after all, as those learned in such matters say that Lord Rossthorne's views as to his title are not correct, and that by the Act of Edward III., reversing the attainder of Nigel, the fourth baron, the female line had been excluded from the succession. This his Lordship admits, but says that the Act in question was repealed, with parts of others, in the following reign, by a clerical error, and that the law which was passed afterwards to set things right, makes no mention of the female line at all. I must confess that I do not understand much about the question. All I know is, that Mrs. Frankland was perplexed and annoyed when she first heard there was a probability of her becoming "my lady" in her own right, and not as Stevie's wife; and I am sure she will be rather pleased to avoid an honor so held. This is about the only subject upon which she and her husband do not agree. The latter declares loudly, tossing his first-born in the air, that "he looks every inch a peer [the brat is five months old], and shall not be done out of his rights."

This sentiment Lord Rossthorne, who has returned, applauds; and Mrs. Stevie looks on with a mother's love-light in her eyes, not knowing exactly what to say.









